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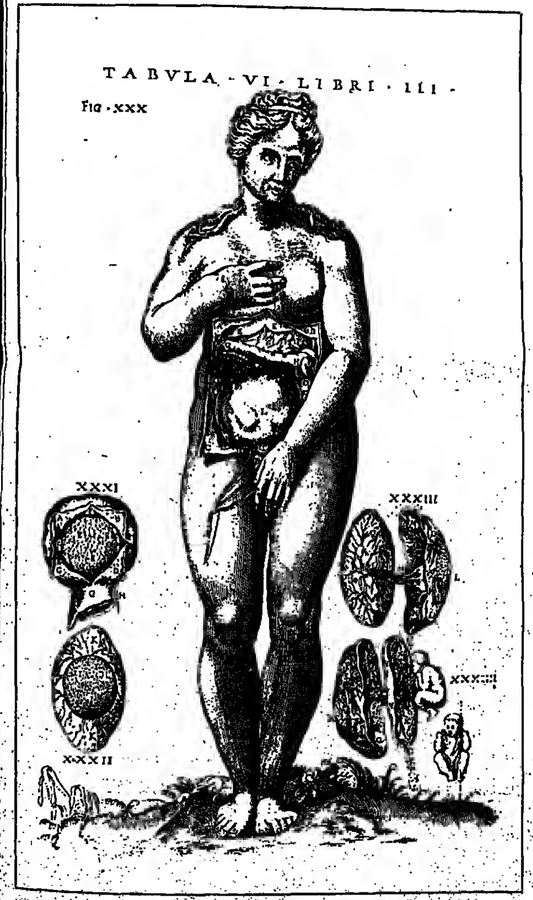

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C. J. Rawson on 'Against Criticism'

Letters of Mallarmé; Hebrew verse

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JUNE 11 1982

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

Whole works and partial truths

C. J. Rawson

IAIN MCGILCHRIST
Against Criticism
221pp. Faber. £12.50.
0 571 11922 0

This book is dedicated to the proposition that criticism is a self-defeating activity, whose procedures of "analysis and classification" by definition elude the irreducible totality of the works it applies itself to. Its only possible success is indirect, not because indirectness is "more subtle, but because no other approach to its object exists. . . . Criticism works by a denial, not by an assertion, of itself."

"Against criticism": the title means what it says, and not just about critics. Iain McGilchrist doesn't like, but about all criticism as such. But it also means the opposite of what it says, because cunning circumventions of its predicament are happily available. These are said to involve renunciation of the critic's analytical tools, though it is not always easy to see in what way McGilchrist himself can be said to have renounced them, especially in his chapter on Wordsworth. It may be that the excellence of the result is to be taken as in itself a transcendence of limitations; or that his highly personal but entirely traditional style of pithy description and adjudication is felt to be sufficiently non-analytic, or non-classifying. Either way, criticism is said to work only in opposition to its own methods. Thus "the title can be read in two ways", and McGilchrist has written a book of criticism. Though the title doesn't say so, the larger part of the book consists of critical essays on Johnson, Sterne and Wordsworth.

Many of McGilchrist's assumptions derive from Romantic and post-Romantic poetics, though Heraclitus (and some Eastern sages) are invoked as authorities. To state a *meaning* is to alter it, and "direct statement" is not only incomplete "but . . . misses the mark entirely". Hence his interest, both in art and in discourse about art, in the logical gap, free of connective clutter and pregnant with unspoken significance, in silence, "the interstices and vibrant spaces" between words. It is no accident that two of his three authors, Sterne and Wordsworth, had a deep interest in the potential riches of wordless communication. The third, Johnson, was, on the contrary, one of the most explicit and indeed sententious authors in the language. But McGilchrist suggests that Johnson's predilection for the *sententia* and his love of aphorism are themselves signs of devotion to the wordless elements in any assertion of truth. Aphorism is a mode of expression especially given to creating "alliances" around itself:

> By their reticence, by confining, that is, what they actually say, and yet at the same time lending that partial statement an appearance of general application and finality, epigrams are peculiarly suitable to Johnson's needs. The cultivation of Baconian epigram goes hand in hand . . . with his disapproval of parenthesis. Parenthesis destroys the all-important sense of finality: it introduces qualifying material, which expands the area of reference, and simultaneously contracts the authority of the statement.

The point is well made. There are, of course, finalities and finalities. Qualification and parenthesis are favourite tools of Henry James and of F. R. Leavis, both of them in their way as dogmatic as Johnson and as much given to uncompromising magisterial utterance. For James especially, qualification and elaboration were part of the density of truth, not an attenuation. They often seem as irreducible as the "main" statement, and aspire to exhaustive totality, however unattainable, where Johnson (and McGilchrist) prefer to see partial statement held momentarily in a total view. For Leavis, parenthesis can act not as a qualifier but as a crypto-intensive, as in the famous comment on Sterne's "irresponsible (and nasty) trifling". The finality is that of the imperious pedagogue. Johnson had more of this than of James's analytic elaboration. But he differs from both in his principled wilfulness, his readiness to assert contradictory opinions with equal conviction, his "sober recognition of diversity as a philosophical fact".

McGilchrist is right to suggest that such things "stem not from the unsettled condition of Johnson's character, but from the partial nature of all truth". The striking truth of the immediate mood, the knock-down assertion of some literally obvious phenomenon which seems to make nonsense of a larger statement, were Johnson's way of making vivid to himself and to others facts which had every right to be taken singly and without reference to the more systematic body of knowledge or belief into which, on another plane, they might need to be fitted. I do not think Johnson regarded aphorisms as a sort of conceptual counterpart of the Imagists' "image", and he certainly wanted his "facts" to be referrable to a larger coherence. But larger integrations were laborious and took time, and risked delaying the excavation of the "facts" themselves. McGilchrist quotes this wonderfuly revealing remark to Boswell:

> I love anecdotes. I fancy mankind may come in time to write all aphoristically, except in narrative; grow weary of preparation and connexion and illustration and all those arts by which a big book is made. If a man is to wait till he weaves anecdotes into a system, we may be long in getting them, and get but few in comparison of what we might get.

This seems, remarkably, to be predicting a later tradition of aphoristic utterance, of which the masters were to include Blake, Nietzsche, and the Wallace Stevens who wrote prose "Adagia" and poems called "Anecdotes" ("anecdotes" being presumably to the narrative mode what aphorisms are to the conceptual). But Johnson, whose own "sententious" style is normally part of a continuous discourse, would never have wished to resemble any of these. The aphoristic tradition he knew about was a rationalist rather than intuitionist one, that of his admired Bacon, or of La Rochefoucauld. But above all, as McGilchrist says, his "accent is practical", concerned not with proclaiming an ideal style of utterance but with salvaging the largest possible number of available truths from the losses and delays attendant on a misconceived perfectionism or an inessential orderlieness.

The aphoristic mode attracts McGilchrist because it defies the normal linear progress of expository discourse, as well as the natural multiplicity of things, collapsing both into a concentrated perception of wholeness. For this same reason he is attracted to a model of circular rather than linear movement, similarly drawn from poetics, Romantic and modern:

> The common end of all *narrative*, nay, of *all*, Poems is to convert a *series* into a *Whole*: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a *strait* Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion – the snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth.

McGilchrist cites these words by Coleridge in his essay on Wordsworth. The integration envisaged in the old image of the snake and its tail suggests a greater degree of schematism than McGilchrist (or for that matter Coleridge) would normally want. The emphasis is on a point of rest, the moment of what Stevens called "arrested peace", and McGilchrist quotes Wordsworth's "Calm is all nature as a resting wheel", which "combines the image of circularity with that of *suspension*". When McGilchrist asserts that "progress to truth is not linear, but continually circling and searching its own origins", he comes very close to Stevens on

> the merely going round,
> Until merely going round is a final good,
> The way wine comes at a table in a wood.

This too envisages points of rest, the "table in a wood" returning to its original element, plus the pleasure of wine. But it is valued as a momentary conclusiveness, a finality "for a moment final" arrived at with the sudden shock of the *trouvaille* or find: like a circling bird in Stevens suddenly coming down, swooping (rather than, so to speak, stooping) to truth. The find, to vary the metaphor, becomes in a favourite phrase of McGilchrist's a *leap* of imagination.

Like much critical thinking of a neo-Romantic cast, McGilchrist's argument hankers tacitly and ideally after the short poem, where instantaneous totalities are more readily apprehended. Circle or no circle, we experience literature in a "linear" way in the sense that it takes time to read any text and that we usually do so consecutively from page 1 onwards. Some Romantics were actively troubled by this circumstantial or even biological inconvenience. Poe tried to work out the optimum length for a poem, and he and others shrank, in theory at least, from long poems.

McGilchrist's book is in fact concerned not with short poems but with extended texts in verse and prose, and he proposes a way of describing such works which may seem to derive from novelists as much as from poetic theorists. Books, like persons, are complex, multifarious, "inconsistent". A person may be "undogmatic" and also "assertive", "original" yet "sceptical of all innovation", and, in addition to these apparent contradictions possessed of "a sense of humour which transforms each of his qualities individually". How do you get each item of the description in, in such a way as to let each feature appear with a due awareness of the other features which complicate or contradict it? The formulation recalls Ford Madox Ford's account of the strategies of portraiture he and Conrad "evolved" in preference to the simple chronological unfolding they deplored in British fiction. In getting to know people in real life, he says,

> you never do go straight forward. You meet an English gentleman at your golf club. He is beefy, full of health, the moral of the boy from an English Public School of the finest type. You discover, gradually, that he is hopelessly neurasthenic, dishonest in matters of small change, but unexpectedly self-sacrificing, a dreadful liar but a most painfully careful student of lepidoptera and, finally, from the public prints, a bigamist who was once, under another name, hammered on the Stock Exchange. . . . Still, there he is, the beefy, full-fed fellow, moral of an English Public School product. To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past.

Ford's account, however schematic and exemplary, has a primary vitality of human portraiture naturally lacking in the critic's adjectival abstractions, a difference which McGilchrist might cheerfully admit as showing the natural infirmity of the critical enterprise. Another difference is that Ford's passage presupposes a diversity that remains to some extent unsynthesized, whereas McGilchrist envisages some notional state in which each descriptive term is charged with an awareness of all the others: "Clearly, in order to justify using – and to sophisticate the very meaning of – any one term, we will need to bring all the others to bear on it."

These models both seem to be concerned with portrayal by impressionist glimpses, "a few notes". What happens when a fuller picture, "reasonably fair and detailed", is required? The same difficulty arises of where to say what: "how do we get the reader to appreciate what we are going to tell him at the end while he is tackling the beginning?" The novelists have puzzled themselves over this one too, including the chief novelist studied in this book, Sterne:

> ". . . if I reserve it for either of those parts of my story, – I ruin the story I'm upon, – and if I tell it here – I anticipate matters, and ruin it there."

Like Sterne and like Ford, McGilchrist reports that the descriptive process is "not in a straight line". It operates by "reverberation, back and forth, reassessing what we thought we already knew". But the two novelists seem happy for the necessary diversities to unfold themselves in time, whereas the critic seems both to yearn for an impossible ideal of simultaneity and at the same time take pleasure in an I-told-you-so declaration of this impossibility. Bringing the whole portrait into focus "cannot be done explicitly at all, for every phrase would have literally to contain the entire text". What begins as an approach seemingly modelled on the novelists ends up by making demands which have no real chance of being met except in a short poem. Or perhaps not ever there. The reader

> needs to stand outside the linear process of description and take the whole thing in at once, as one tries to do with a painting – which is perhaps why we are fond of speaking of a portrait when referring to a verbal description of character.

Paintings have the advantage over even the shortest poem of appearing whole in "no time at all", and the impossibility of experiencing the literary text in this way provides McGilchrist with an almost ostentatiously unsatisfied longing. He insists everywhere on the irreducibility of the work of art, but the book's whole argument shrinks from its own logical conclusion, by implying that there is a sense in which the irreducible object is also a fixed totality, like a picture on the wall, which the critic aspires to grasp. The rich untidiness of all true readings, which the book celebrates very eloquently, is in one sense more effectively suggested by Denis Donoghue's model, in his recent book *Ferocious Alphabets*, of an ever uncompleted dialogue between author and reader.

It is a model which brings Sterne to mind, and Sterne, contemplating the impossibility of getting everything in at once, takes that impossibility on board as itself part of the subject of his novel. The overt authorial interference masquerades as a pretended helplessness to control the flow of experience, where Ford might pretend non-interference and exercise covert control. Sterne's sharings of his authorial self would normally seem an intolerable self-indulgence if practised by a critic (some find them intolerable in Sterne himself), but they dramatize the heaving untidiness of both event and perception beyond all talk of "portraits", well-wrought urns, or even Grecian ones. McGilchrist says:

> His museum contains not the Attic vase, that unravished bride, but the unkissed maiden upon it. His journey provides him with the exhibition space for many such moments: indeed the *fille de chambre*, with which by chance his journey ends, is like Keats' girl, an ecstasy of promised fulfilment, "for ever warm, and still to be enjoyed".

The point he rightly makes is that the unconsummated kiss in the *fille de chambre* episode is an event (or non-event) in the narrative, and not a posture frozen for contemplation by the narrator in a pre-existing artefact. But the episode is really very unlike, and it is interesting that McGilchrist's thoughts should turn so readily to Keats's poem (actually a much finer thing in my view). Sterne's episode becomes for McGilchrist the reader what the urn was for Keats the narrator, a definitive crystallization of the unfinished, and thus I suspect one of those places

School prospectus

Christopher Norris

ANN JEFFERSON and DAVID ROBEY (Editors)
Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction
186pp. Batsford. £4.95.
0 7134 3454 6

"Under which king, Bezonian?" was F. R. Leavis's ironic title for an essay in *Scrutiny* rejecting the Marxist call for a forthright declaration of that journal's political stance. A few years earlier Leavis had returned a somewhat similar reply to René Wellek, in this case refusing the request that he, Leavis, should make some attempt to set out the "philosophy" which underpinned his practical-critical judgments. The debate has moved on with the recent change in theoretical climate, due mainly to the influence of structuralist and post-structuralist thinking. Leavis's erstwhile opponents are themselves now faced with varieties of "Marxist" and "philosophic" criticism utterly remote from the fighting ground of their own earlier choosing.

It may still be possible to write with a fine professorial disdain which treats these theorists as so many bother-headed enemies of imagination whose ideas are not worth serious pursuit. But this reaction, though widespread, can hardly stand up against the growing awareness – in many university departments of English – that literary studies are in the process of radical transformation. It is in full two decades since Barthes and the Nouvelle Critique issued their challenge to the supposed neutrality and ideological innocence of traditionalist scholarship. The cultured time-lag has meant that students in this country are suddenly faced with a bewildering range of theoretical options, mostly deriving from that early structuralist challenge but presenting, by now, a complex history of internal schism and debate. The most visible rifts on this perilous terrain are those marked out between Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and that variety of deconstruction – or negative hermeneutics – associated with Derrida and his American disciples.

Ann Jefferson and David Robey offer their collection of essays as a guide for the perplexed, a broad-based survey of the movements and ideas most active in recent debate. Between them they cover the major part of the book's theoretical ground, Jefferson contributing chapters on "Russian Formalism" and "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism", while Robey writes on the American New Critics and modern linguistic approaches to literary style. There are also essays by Elizabeth Wright on psychoanalytic criticism, and by David Forgacs on Marxist literary theory. The general approach is briskly informative with a strong sense of historical development and a useful stress on affinities and differences, as between the Russian and American concepts of Formalist method. Given such a wide diversity of fields it is unreasonable to expect any unified perspective or ground-plan of argument. The editors have done a good job in providing sufficient cross-references from chapter to chapter for the student to grasp an emergent pattern in the issues they raise. The focus is occasionally sharpened by taking specific differences of view – like the exchange between Lacan and Derrida over Poe's "The Purloined Letter" – and pointing up their theoretical implications.

If the essays have anything like a common teleology, it is the movement from positive concepts ("structure", "unconscious", Marxist "realism") to a level of reflexive questioning and vigilant self-criticism. Dr Jefferson provides a good example in tracing the internal shifts and mutations which led from a self-proclaimed structuralist "science of the text" to the post-structuralist denial of any such firme or system. She makes the shrewd choice of Barthes's *S/Z* as a text where the lingering dream of structuralist method is dispersed by glimpses of a utopian "free-play" pointing the way toward Derridan deconstruction. The other essays mostly follow a similar pattern. Thus Forgacs, on the Marxist debate, proceeds from the "reflection model" (Lukács), via theories of textual production and genesis (Pierre Macherey and Lucien Goldmann), to the "language-centred" materialist semiotics of Bakhtin and the Russian post-formalists. Wright pursues the same broadly diagnostic outline, from "classical" psychoanalytic readings – notably Marie Bonaparte on Poe – to Lacan and his structuralist recasting of Freudian topology and language.

This approach is saved from mere cliquish up-to-dateness by the serious attention that is devoted to Lukács, Goldmann and others who often receive short shrift in post-structuralist accounts. In fact it is a point in favour of this volume that it offers more than a perfunctory account of movements – like the American New Criticism – which scarcely rate a mention in other recent compendia of this kind. Particularly suggestive are the links which Robey perceives between the semiotic enterprise of C. S. Peirce and Charles Morris and the formalist projection of critics like W. K. Wimsatt, notably the latter's use of the term "iconic".

On balance, this book presents a lively and authoritative reading of issues which should find a place in any self-respecting modern syllabus of literary studies.

Hollywood is sometimes right

Who is that up there? Hanging
on that cross?
That relatively noble and seemingly
victimised figure?

That is King, who was called King,
Who wanted to be of help,
Who suffered for us,
who died that we might live –

And left us some of his lesser features,
Sharp teeth, and a strong voice,
and a rather short temper.

Herbivorousness was not transmissive,
Or else the iron inhibited.

D. J. Enright

The poetic faculty

J. M. Cocking

HENRI MONDOR and LLOYD JAMES AUSTIN (Editors)
Stéphane Mallarmé: Correspondance, VI, Janvier 1893–Juillet 1894
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VII, Juillet 1894–Décembre 1895
366pp.
Paris: Gallimard

In 1893 Mallarmé escaped at last from what he once called "un labeur linguistique par lequel quotidiennement sanglote de s'interrompre ma noble faculté poétique". At the age of fifty-one he had spent thirty years as a teacher of English, so he decided to retire early "et vraiment débuter dans la littérature". Raymond Poincaré, then Minister of Education and Art, granted him a supplementary pension of 1200 francs from a special fund for intellectuals, and increased it to 1800 francs in 1895.

His life went on, however, much as before, though with longer stays at his country retreat at Valvins and a greater sense of leisure. Revered as the type of the supremely dedicated artist, much loved and sought after as a friend, he had to write a great many letters acknowledging new works or personal dedications, answering requests for help, keeping in touch with his friends, inviting or answering invitations. Many of his letters have been lost and are known only through the references in those he received and preserved, which are set out by Lloyd Austin in the footnotes and add a great deal to the interest of the volume.

The style of Mallarmé's letters can change radically according to their function. To Dr Evans, congratulating him on founding a hostel for American women students, Mallarmé composes an elegantly formal letter as conventional in its syntax as in its sentiments. He is matter-of-fact to Whistler, playfully amorous and teasing to Méry Laurent. To Berthe Morisot, too, he writes straightforwardly, though with pleasantly precious and fanciful touches. But his letters of thanks for books received show how the topic of literature can automatically switch his verbal imagination into his literary mode and rarefy the stylistic atmosphere. He always manages to translate his appreciation into his own aesthetic convantions. Even Zola, whose imagination might seem to be of a different order, is brought into the Symbolist fold; and Mallarmé's praise of Rachilde, a purveyor of hard porn and bestiality so methodically neurotic as to be funny, seems more ingenious than genuine: "Toute une bouffée originelle si mal dite sensualité, où se résume à des instants, le souhait humain". Some of his comments are as delightful as they are typical; in others he seems to caricature his own syntactic mannerisms.

Mallarmé was usually obdurate about reducing the obscurity of his prose. His contributions to the *National Observer*, which had bothered so many of its readers, came to an end in July 1893. Louis Ganderax asked for the text of his lecture on "La Musique et les lettres" for the *Revue de Paris*, but returned it as too difficult for *his* readers. It was printed in the *Revue Blanche* and also in book form. The reviewer in the *Journal des Débats* said that a translation should have been provided. Curiously enough it was a note in French in the *New York Herald* that showed some understanding and appreciation of Mallarmé's style: "sa construction même est évocatrice d'idées en nous latentes". His correspondents, of course, were full of admiration, though a few of the younger poets were turning away from him and looking to new literary principles.

On one occasion Mallarmé did consent to make things easier for the general reader; this was when he sought publicity for his project of a fund for artists. The idea was inspired by his impression of the privileged lives of the Oxford Fellows when he went there to lecture in February 1894. What he proposed, when he went back to Paris, was that publishers should be taxed on all editions of books out of copyright, including reprints of the classics. The money was to be invested in a fund to make life easier for writers and artists. Mallarmé sent a letter to *Le Figaro*; the editor asked him to make it easier to read, and for once Mallarmé obliged. A good deal of public interest was awakened, but publishers protested vociferously and the project came to nothing.

There is a good deal of anecdotic interest in the correspondence about the lecture on "La Musique et les lettres" which Mallarmé delivered at the invitation of the Taylorian Society in Oxford and then, through Whibley's good offices, in Pembroke College, Cambridge. At the Oxford lecture, Mallarmé realized, there was total incomprehension, with no reactions beyond the polite from an audience consisting mainly of ladies who wanted to hear some French spoken. In Cambridge, he wrote home, the audience would have to pay and might show more interest. Only about twenty people turned up, but Mallarmé was convinced that they understood him perfectly: "Ils écouté religieusement, senti la sympathie entre chaque mot par mon dit et une intelligence. Il fsut dire que la mise en scène était exquise ....."

"La Musique et les lettres" is one of his most important prose pieces. Further statements of his aesthetic convictions were written in 1895. Eleven articles appeared in the *Revue Blanche*; ten under the heading "Variations sur un sujet" and another called "Le Mystère dans les lettres". Preparations went on in a rather desultory way for the Deman edition of the *Poésies complètes*, still to be called, Mallarmé insisted, "ler Cahier", leaving the way open for more to come: "le livre pèche par le petit nombre de vers". There were just a few poems to be added to what had appeared in the Dujardin facsimile edition of 1887.

Mallarmé often delighted his friends with light-hearted and witty "vers de circonstance", but made no headway with the Great Book. At the beginning of his retirement he told Berthe Morisot: "Je travaille, sans trop savoir à quoi . . . ." A few weeks later he seemed more sure of himself in writing to Henri de Régnier: "Je travaille très ferme et je crois retrouver un passé déjà qui me semblait évanouit." But a year later he is less affirmative about his work: "Je travaille, pas fort . . . ."; "Il travaille sous la forme paresse . . . ." "Je me laisse vivre, moi, pour la première fois depuis des années; et paresse, influencé par le radieux commencement d'automne." Not that he had many years left, for work or pleasure.

Some of the most interesting of these letters were quoted in part by Henri Mondor in his *Vie de Mallarmé*, but with very vague dating. Professor Austin's introduction and notes provide, as always, all the background information needed to follow the references in the letters and to reconstruct the course of Mallarmé's life and relations in great detail. It is good that, after the long delay in the appearance of Volume V, the succession is re-established and moving at an impressive speed.

English researchers are prominent in the footnotes, notably the late Carl Barbier and Austin Gill. F. W. Leakey is named as contributing from an anonymous private collection the full text of a gem for connoisseurs, in which Mallarmé asked to contribute to a symposium of opinions on the aesthetics, hygiene and propriety of bicycling fashions for ladies, and to express a preference for skirt or trousers, produced one of his most engaging *concetti*:

Je ne suis, devant votre question, comme devant les chevauchesses de l'acier, qu'un passant qui se gare; mais si leur mobile est celui absolu de montrer des *jambes*, je préfère que ce soit d'une jupe relevée, vestige féminin, pas du pourpoint-pantalon, que l'hétéroclitement fondé, me renverse et me darde.

Preformationists and epigenesists

Martin Pollock

SHIRLEY A. ROE
Matter, Life, and Generation: Eighteenth-century embryology and the Haller-Wolff debate
214pp. Cambridge University Press. £16.
0 521 23540 5

WILLIAM HARVEY
Disputations touching the Generation of Animals
Translated with introduction and notes by Gweneth Whitteridge
502pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £25.
0 632 00492 4

There can be few more fascinating stories in the history of biology than that of the struggles to grasp and understand the problem of the cyclic mechanism of reproduction and development of organisms from one generation to the next. It is the more poignant since it is only within the past twenty to thirty years that it can be said to have been "solved", and then only partially.

We now know that, at the molecular level of analysis, organisms reproduce themselves by a self-copying multiplication of a set of "instructions" (from both parents) incorporated in a series of large molecules (the double-stranded DNA helix) by a reciprocal, complementary replication process. Strand *A* of the double helix gives rise to strand *A'* (the sister strand) which itself then promotes the formation of another strand *A* and so on, like alternating mirror images. The "instructions" take the form of sequences of four different types of chemical building-blocks ("nucleotides") arranged in a specific order along the immensely long DNA "tape". That order determines the types of protein to be formed and thus the basic characters of the whole organism. We know that all the cells of the organism – right from the fertilized egg to those of the mature adult – contain (with few exceptions) the complete set of "instructions" for building the organism. Whether that developing cell becomes part of the brain, liver, skin or what have you, and *when*, is controlled by the switching on or off of the relevant piece of DNA. There are still gaps in our knowledge of the control mechanisms involved, but those basic principles are accepted without controversy in the scientific world generally.

Previously, from Aristotle onwards, there had been no lack of controversy over almost every aspect of inheritance and embryogenesis. Debates concerned the relative parts played by male and female in creation of the offspring, the nature and role of the male semen, the mechanism of growth and differentiation of the foetus etc, but in particular, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were focused on the great battles between those who believed in "pre-formation" and the protagonists of "epigenesis".

"Pre-formationists" held that miniate copies of the adult form were in existence right from the beginning, each perfect replica containing a smaller copy within it, like a nest of Chinese boxes, all present from the time of their original creation by God. Reproduction, then, was really simply a question of growth by enlargement and essentially the problem did not exist. "Epigenesists" believed that the embryo was formed by forces shaping and directing its development from what was originally undifferentiated matter, but they differed among themselves on the nature of the controlling factors.

In one sense, the position of the preformationists was unassailable since they did not have to face the great problem of reproduction: it had all been done previously by God. They were a little worried by deformed monsters being able to give birth to normal offspring and they had to produce *ad hoc* explanations for the multiple progeny that could arise from a single coelenterate polyp (and indeed from plants) without the need for a normal cycle of development; they had to skirt round the difficulty of a final end to all life when the copies eventually ran out, but, for some, it all fitted beautifully with the idea of a final Day of Judgement and the direct control of all creation by the Deity.

But pre-formationism died a natural death during the first half of the last century, mainly when it became apparent that duration of life on earth had to be measured in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of years or more and it was too much to suppose those mini-copies could have stretched back so many generations, quite apart from the unwelcome prospect of their running out in the future. Yet it is interesting to note that our modern explanation of inheritance and embryogenesis carries with it elements of both preformation (albeit limited) *and* epigenesis in the pre-existing DNA that is passed on directly, ready-made, to offspring from parents and the basic chemical mechanism by which this same DNA passes on the message for the construction of the organism's specific characters from non-specific building-blocks. The principal missing element before 1953 (when Watson and Crick elucidated the structure of the DNA double helix) was an understanding of the copying mechanism, to which our scientific ancestors paid so little attention, although one had to be offered, as a purely logical necessity, in order to complete the picture.

Georges Buffon, seated on the far right, in conversation with John Needham, while two of their colleagues aid their search for animalcules in the female semen. This engraving from Buffon's Histoire Naturelle *(1749) is reproduced in the book by Shirley Roe reviewed here.*

In *Matter, Life and Generation* Shirley A. Roe deals with one – perhaps the most striking – example of the debate between pre-formationists and epigenesists in her detailed analysis of the arguments between Albrecht v. Haller and Caspar Friedrick Wolff in the mid-eighteenth century, supported by a translation of the nine letters from Wolff to Haller (rather diminished in interest by the absence of the lost complementary correspondence from Haller to Wolff).

Haller was a prolific writer, a polymath by disposition and deeply religious ("Enough, there is a God: Nature shouts it out!"). For him science had to occur within the limits of his religion: its function was to demonstrate how the Creator did his work. Haller's outlook was essentially empirical and Newtonian; he was a supporter of Bacon, violently opposed to Descartes, and suspicious of any explanation involving chance that might be used as a challenge to the omnipotence of God. Writing to his pre-formationist friend, Charles Bonnet, he warned against the danger of admitting the formation of a finger to chance "because if so, then why not a man?"

Wolff was a product of the rationalist revolution of the eighteenth century, but by no means a crude mechanist/reductionist and only hesitantly anti-vitalist since he was aware that the *vis essentialis* which he postulated as the specific controlling force directing the ordered development of the embryo, was ill-defined and had to be more than a general "bulldog force". For Haller, the embryonic heart was there before fertilization and so were other structures which Wolff pointed out were part of the structure of the egg and not of the embryo. Wolff could "see no heart", nor even the U-shaped tube that preceded it in the early stages, but was rightly criticized by Haller with the argument that not seeing something doesn't mean it isn't there.

Professor Roe's main point, however, is that the controversy between the two stemmed from their contrasted philosophies rather than from scientific arguments. But it is questionable whether this is any more true for them than for many other thinkers in those days (or even now!). Her style is, nevertheless, a valuable account of how biologists tended to debate at the time. Her analysis of the subject within the contemporary context is also useful, although it would have benefited from a more explicit interpretation in terms of modern molecular biology in order to illustrate the limitations involved. Her style is somewhat repetitive and it is irritating to have the prolific "footnotes" huddled together at the end of the book instead of on the relevant page, or at least at the end of each chapter.

Going back a hundred years to William Harvey, writing on essentially the same subject, but more comprehensively, we now have a new and modernized translation of his *Disputations touching the Generation of Animals* (published first in Latin in 1651) by Gweneth Whitteridge. This is an important event and much to be welcomed. The earlier translations in 1653 (anon) and 1847 (by Willis) have long been out of print and not often obtainable even for reference in many major libraries. This third translation has been based to some extent on the others, but errors and some out-of-date expressions have been eliminated; the flavour of seventeenth-century concepts has been retained, however, by keeping some of the older words, especially where the original meaning could be lost by using only modern phraseology. The work is enriched by a valuable introduction, where Harvey's achievements and his failures are presented against a historical background of previous and current ideas on procreation and development. This, however, like Roe's, might have been more helpful had it been contrasted with modern explanations at a molecular level, which is the only way of providing a solution to the basic problems of the self-copying process involved and the mechanism by which the hereditary "blue-print" directs the construction of the specific organism that emerges.

This great work of Harvey's is far longer than the earlier and much better-known *Circulation of the Blood*, but can claim no similar breakthrough. Dr Whitteridge believes it is an unfinished work which was only reluctantly released for publication when Harvey was an old man, on the insistence of his colleague George Ent, a future President of the Royal College of Physicians.

The whole subject, from sexual courtship and mating, through procreation and development of the embryo to parturition, is treated systematically. Apart from the rather long sections devoted purely to observational anatomy (on which Harvey set such store), it is fascinating to read. Some of the descriptions of sexual approaches and copulation in birds (especially the passionate frolics of ostriches) are both informative and delightfully entertaining. Harvey explains that he uses Aristotle and his teacher Fabricius, both of whom he quotes at length, as a basis for argument, for and against. He made several significant discoveries, of which the most important was recognition of the egg as the starting-point for the generation of the offspring of all types of organisms ("omne vivum ex ovo") whether or not they were hatched outside the womb or born viviparously.

Like Aristotle, he was a firm epigenesist, but differed in his judgment of the female role in procreation which Aristotle considered was only to provide material basis (ie, food) upon which the male operated generatively. But it was on that very point that Harvey ran into his biggest difficulty. Indeed, it was the mechanism by which copulation provoked fertilization and development of the previously quiescent egg, and the possible role of the male semen in the process (accepting a bi-parental inheritance that could hardly be denied, despite Aristotle), that seemed to puzzle him most. One often feels that he is repeatedly circling round the problem, not always consistently, never reaching a firm conclusion, and arguing with himself in the hope that something clearer will emerge: he finally confesses "openly" that he "was at a standstill" or even attributes the whole business to the "will of Almighty God", an admission which he would surely have thought equivalent to failure.

Harvey's predicament stemmed from his inability to demonstrate the presence of male semen in the uterus after copulation – either in the hen or the female deer that he examined so carefully. Ironically, his own sceptical attitude towards "idle dreams built upon conjecture and slender reasoning and unsupported by any testimony of the eyes" must have been at least partly responsible for his attributing too much importance to his *not* seeing the spermatozoa, which of course were there but too small to see. (This was only twenty years or so before Leeuwenhoek demonstrated the presence of wriggling animalcules in male semen with his new microscope.) But it is still surprising that Harvey did not apparently even consider the possibility of having missed something too small to recognize with his crude hand lens, particularly when he had stressed the possible significance of the analogy between fertilization of the egg and contagious infection in certain diseases (rabies, leprosy, plague etc) which "scatter their seeds through the air and so propagate in the bodies of others diseases like themselves . . ." by a process which he repeatedly refers to as hidden and mysterious.

In any case, his failure was disastrous because he concluded that no *material* substance could be responsible for fertilization and he began to draw comparisons with the "action at a distance" of a magnet, the effects of contagious diseases (as previously mentioned) and even the generation of purely mental conceptions in the brain, arguing that just as a spider "knows" how to spin a web, so an immaterial idea can bring the woman to conceive a child.

It is in fact often difficult to be sure what Harvey's opinion really was and it is in this connexion that the translator or editor carries great responsibility. To take just one example: on p 141 we read ". . . from the male proceeds only the procreative or *formative power* [my italics]

All atoms together

Stephen Clark

CHARLES BIRCH and JOHN B. COBB
The Liberation of Life: From the cell to the community.
353pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.50
0 521 23787 4

Charles Birch and John Cobb, professors respectively of biology and theology, have collaborated to produce this study of "life" and its "liberation". Their commitment to the cause is clear, and commendable; it is unfortunate that the resulting volume is something less than gripping.

The liberation they preach is twofold: on the one hand, they aim to liberate the concept of life from "objectivist" or mechanicist misrepresentations of the kind popularized by Jacques Monod; on the other, they look forward to "a shift from manipulation and management of living creatures, human and non-human alike, to respect for life in its fullness". Only, it is proposed, if we come to understand life and the world differently will we be able to see our way to a non-exploitative, cooperative relationship with our fellows. Trust in "Life" is "trust in the emergent possibilities for creative transformation in each new situation". Such trust will reveal that the "well being of others contributes directly to the well-being of oneself", for there are no self-subsistent, independent atoms. We are all members of one another and of the living world, stages and segments of a continuing adventure. "People are guests on this planet, guests of each other and all other creatures".

The opening chapters of this work sketch a view of biology intended to make room for Purpose alongside Monod's Chance and Necessity. The authors emphasize, as have Alister Hardy and W. H. Thorpe, that the choices of living creatures have played a vital part in guiding evolutionary history. Wild flowers are beautiful in our eyes because they were beautiful in the eyes of insects. They also emphasize, in what they label an "ecological" account of molecules, cells and organisms, that the behaviour of any of these is in part a function of its place in a wider sphere: "each element behaves as it does because of the relations it has to other elements in the whole, and these relations are not well understood in terms of the laws of mechanics". Even at the inorganic level, the properties of sodium when combined with chlorine cannot be inferred simply from the properties of sodium or chlorine in the absence of the other. The authors reject the non-explanatory concept of "emergence" (whereby the properties of common salt appear by magic) in favour of an "ecological" approach, allowing that sodium atoms (or the sodium-atom events) have different properties when in the presence of chlorine-atom events. "Life", correspondingly, is neither an emergent property nor an illusion; the non-Democritean atoms which make us up are themselves alive – when appropriately placed.

What is unclear is whether any clear-headed follower of Monod would see anything worth rejecting in this account. That the choices (or the desires) of living beings serve to explain some evolutionary episodes does not itself constitute an objection to Monod's picture. Monod claimed in *Chance and Necessity* that the present diversity of living beings could be seen merely as the product of chemical activity by a self-replicating molecule whose appearance in the first seas was a unique and unpredictable event intended by no one. The fact that some later events were intended (which is not shown, as the authors apparently suppose, merely by the fact that desire played some part in bringing them about) is not obviously relevant to Monod's thesis. Nor is there much reason to suppose that Monod is inconsistent in being both a determinist (though one who acknowledges the unpredictability of unique events) and a non-fatalist. Finally, it is not clear that anyone could reasonably deny that things behave differently under different environmental conditions, nor that such differences cannot be adequately described in mechanistic terms (that is, terms adequate to a description of machines).

Having outlined their "ecological" picture of the living world, the authors contend that subjective experience is present at all levels of the world: more or less richly ornamented. It is this richness of experience which is to be valued, whether in humans or in non-humans, individuals or species or ecosystems. It is not a "balanced" but a richly experienced world that we should be aiming to preserve. "The style of life most appropriate to an understanding of life in terms of the ecological model is one of trust and service", and the later chapters of the book are devoted to working out the requirements of such a changed life-style in medicine, economics, agriculture and industry. The ideology of unlimited and exploitative growth is fervently rejected, and we are urged to move towards the world of small, self-organizing, interdependant communities which has long been the anarchist dream. The authors can hardly be described as doom-mongers, as their constant thema is one of trust in the unrealized capacities of "Life" (a term which by the end of the book seems to have taken on most of the traditional connotations of "God" – at least as this term is understood by "process theologians" of Hartshorne's school), but those who support the possibilities of high technology and genuine market capitalism are likely to think them unduly fearful for our future.

A reviewer who finds himself in agreement with so much of a book, but yet profoundly dissatisfied with it, must explain himself. Although I have criticized their supposed answer to Monodtheism, and would like to have seen a more careful attention to the concepts of holistic or organismic or "ecological" theory, I do not do so out of any affection for Monod's metaphysics or his ethics, and entirely accept that we are all members one of another. Though I do not myself find such terms as "life" very perspicuous, I would be mean-spirited to deny that religious and ethical fervour may be encouraged by such language. Though it would have been good to see a more careful attempt to come to grips with a sophisticated advocacy of growth, high technology and human superiority, it is also useful to have a clear statement of the biological and ethical imperatives which will require a radical change of life. Why then is this book so difficult to read? Is it simply that I find it all depressingly familiar? Or is it (as perhaps my quotations from it may confirm) simply written in too dotted, too jargon-ridden a style to have much market this side of the Atlantic?

Arachnid associations

John Cloudsley-Thompson

PETER N. WITT and JEROME S. ROVNER (Editors)
Spider Communication: Mechanisms and Ecological Significance
440pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £21.10.
0 691 08291 X

Spiders are not to everyone's taste. In 1777 Professor Ross of the University of Aberdeen died, it was said, from the effects of swallowing one in a glass of claret, while, no more than two Christmases ago, I was presented with an unopened bottle of champagne by one of my students – merely because it contained the disintegrated corpse of a small spider. Although I had no difficulty in identifying it as a harmless domestic species, the bottle has never been reclaimed. Cardinal Wolsey could not abide spiders. He had such a horror of the long-legged house-spiders which still frequent Hampton Court Palace that, to this day, *Tegenaria parietina* is known colloquially as the "cardinal spider".

In contrast, to many other people spiders are fascinating animals – although probably few are quite so fond of them as the "great lady still living" (of whom the Rev. E. Topsell wrote in 1607) who "would not leave off eating them". The book under review is "dedicated to all the women and men, past and present, who have contributed to our knowledge of the taxonomy of spiders", and whose efforts have enabled physiologists investigating communication among these animals to identify the species with which they are working – and this is important because different kinds of spider communicate with one another in different ways. Indeed, some of the ways of communication are so characteristic for a species or genus that they can even be used for defining the difference between that group and others.

Understanding communication between living animals requires insight into many different aspects of their lives. If a vibrating tuning-fork should touch one of the radii of its intricate orb-web, the spider which owns the snare and, until that moment, had been hanging face down in the centre of it, turns and positions one front leg on the moving strand. Depending upon a number of varying circumstances – such as the duration of the signal, the frequency with which the tuning-fork is vibrating the spider's appetite, or the time of day – the spider may respond by attacking the tuning-fork as though it were living prey. This behaviour provides evidence that the signal, transmitted mechanically through the silken thread, has been received and decoded. "Lyriform" and "slit" sense-organs on the legs of spiders have been shown to be sensitive to strains in the animals' exoskeletons, induced by vibrations of their web – a subject discussed in a chapter here by Friedrich G. Barth. These receptors send impulses along nerve fibres to the central nervous system, where they are translated into out-going signals which, in turn, cause muscles to contract, producing co-ordinated movements of the legs and body. The various components of this communication system work together to control spider behaviour. They are analysed in the ten chapters on spider communication and the rôle played by each in the total process is defined.

Communication is treated very broadly. A final chapter by Susan E. Riechert and Jadwega Luczak on "Spider foraging: behavioural responses to prey" is included, not only because it contains valuable information on spider behaviour and ecology which has not previously been summarized, but because it rounds off the other chapters by applying aspects of sensory physiology, and other components of communication, to predator-prey interactions. Indeed, this is one of the most interesting chapters in the book, concluding, as it does, that spiders are extremely efficient machines for the capture of prey "largely resulting from their evolution under conditions of limited prey availability". Nevertheless, the chapters that precede it are not to be passed over lightly.

Peter N. Witt's introduction summarizes communication in predatory behaviour, overwintering and resting aggregations, intraspecific and interspecific interactions in dense populations, parasitism, commensalism, sexual behaviour and reproduction. Spiders may eat one another, but the extent of cannibalism depends upon the degree of crowding. Some kinds are parasitic, and steal food from the webs spun by spiders of other species. Some are commensals, living in the nests of ants – sometimes in association with other spiders, beetles and caterpillars. Yet others are social and dwell together in dense aggregations, a topic discussed in a fascinating chapter by J. Wesley Burgess and George W. Uetz. Like other animals, spiders have evolved various ways of sharing living space, and the ability to do so without bloodshed depends upon intercommunication.

The significance and complexity of communication among spiders is explained by Bernard Krafft, who concludes that these creatures are of fundamental interest in the study of animal communication. They use vibratory and visual signals that are often spectacular yet, relatively, stereotyped and easy to quantify. Compared with insects, spiders have developed an original means of communication: the transmission of vibratory information through silk, into which are incorporated sexual, and perhaps social "pheromes" or scents for intra-specific communication – "The spider's touch how exquisitely fine! Feels at each thread, and lives along the line", wrote Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Man*. The reception of vibratory signals is discussed as I have said by F. G. Barth, while G. W. Uetz and Gail E. Stratton show that a surprising number of spider species use stridulation, percussion, or the vibration of appendages to produce sounds which, like the songs of insects, probably serve to achieve reproductive isolation and may play an important rôle in spacing mechanisms and defence against predators.

Few questions in biology are more basic than those of function and adaptive significance. One of these relates to the functions of courtship in spiders, a topic that has aroused heated discussion, especially in relation to jumping-spiders, which hunt their prey by the sense of sight. The dramatic visual displays, dances, and leg-wavings of male Salticidae have been variously analysed in terms of recognition, arousal of the "coy" female, or inhibition of her hunger drive. The hypothesis that courtship functions chiefly as an isolating mechanism holds an important position in zoological theory, but supporting evidence is remarkably scarce. This and other aspects of salticid display are discussed by Robert R. Jackson, while Lyn Forster provides an introduction to visual communication in jumping spiders.

Chemical communication is reviewed by William J. Tietjen and Jerome S. Rovner (who also provide an epilogue). As yet, no attempt has been made to identify the molecular structure or sites of production and release of any spider pheromone. In this field, the study of spiders lags far behind that of insects, and chemical signalling is probably their least understood channel of communication.

Approaching spiders as a behavioural ecologist, Susan Riechert analyses the interactions between communication and coercion, reviewing her own findings and illustrating how desert funnel-web spiders use communication for coercion and this for selfish gain in competition for limited resources. Her data are of special interest in relation to recent theoretical applications of games theory to the prediction of evolutionarily stable strategies.

During the great days of entomology that followed shortly after the end of the Second World War, arachnids (apart from mites) were generally regarded as being somewhat "lesser animals" – having little ecoomic importance and only restricted biological interest. This study, moreover, was complicated by the difficulties of culturing such predatory creatures in the laboratory, and by the problems of identifying them. That situation has now changed: many of these problems have been surmounted and arachnology has become a scientific discipline in its own right. *Spider Communication* communicates to zoologists the extent of this metamorphosis. During the past decade, modern scientific technology has been increasingly applied to investigation of the physiology and behaviour of arachnids. Concentrating on the complex systems of communications among spiders, this book assembles the most recent multi-disciplinary advances by research workers in the United States, New Zealand, France and Germany. In Britain, arachnologists have generally, like the Rev Topsell, been amateur biologists, concerned with aspects of taxonomy and natural history – but it is to them, among others, that this book has been dedicated.

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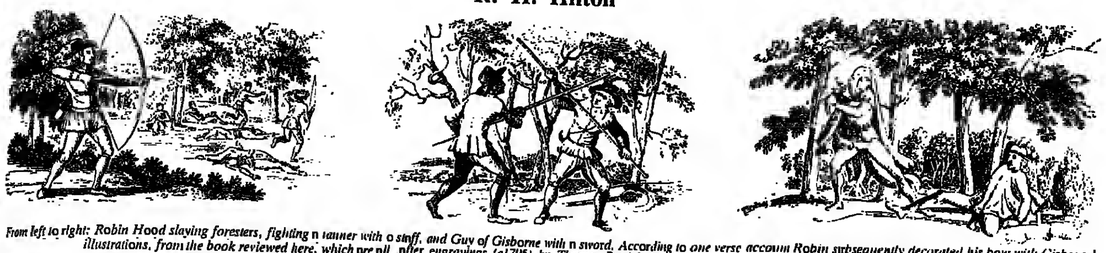
The robber as a hero

R. H. Hilton



From left to right: Robin Hood slaying foresters, fighting a tanner with a staff, and Guy of Gisborne with a sword. According to one verse account Robin subsequently decorated his bow with Gisborne's illustrations, from the book reviewed here, which are all after engravings (c1795) by Thomas Bewick, originally appeared in Joseph Ritson's Robin Hood *(1887).*

J. C. HOLT
Robin Hood
208pp with 51 illustrations and 4 maps. Thames and Hudson. £8.95.
0 5000 25081 2

J. C. Holt has been collecting material on the legendary hero, Robin Hood, for twenty years. In this book, he is not sure that Robin Hood was either legendary or a hero. Unlike some, who consider that the pursuit of a possible "real" originator of a legend is less important than the role played by the legend itself, Professor Holt spends many pages canvassing possibilities. In the end he comes up with an early thirteenth-century Yorkshire criminal whose surname coincided with that of a well-known Wakefield family, whose feudal lords had estates in different parts of England, with retainers who have disseminated an increasing flow of stories. The eponymous hero, then, was no hero.

Professor Holt is, however, as serious about the legend as about the possible "real" originator. Whether there was a "real" Robin Hood or not, the legend was rooted in real life even though it was "contaminated" by earlier romances about noble outlaws such as Fulk Fitzwarin – not to speak of Hereward the Wake. The real life begins in specific locations and one of Holt's more interesting chapters is on "The Physical Setting". This gives welcome detail about south Yorkshire and central Lancashire where so much of the action in the composite *Gest* of Robin Hood is located. The Robin Hood of Barnsdale is a much more vivid figure than he of Nottingham and Sherwood.

The most important chapter in the book is that which discusses the audience for the legend. How does one arrive at the audience of medieval literature? This seems to baffle specialists in medieval literature, but not Holt, the historian of Magna Carta and the landed nobility. He quite rightly shows throughout the book that the audience must have changed between the thirteenth century (if it can be put so early) and the present day. Similarly the qualities, the supposed social milieu and the appeal of the outlaw could change, all of which is well documented here, through to the nineteenth century. There is, of course, another subjective element; that of the historian. Holt's predilections as a specialist in the history of the aristocracy lead him to emphasize, at any rate in the first place, an aristocratic milieu. This constitutes the bulk of the chapter devoted to the audience, in which materials from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth are brought together with little discrimination. Holt's method is rather like that of the old British chronicler, Nennius, "I have made a heap of all that I have found". This particular heap has much of interest in it, no doubt, even if the sense of chronology is rather lost and the contents include a lot of very long quotations from printed sources.

The milieu which Holt chooses as that of the legend is rather on the fringes of the aristocracy: that is, the unruly and mobile retainers of the aristocratic households. Anybody who reads the proceedings of itinerant justices or of the justices of the forest will be aware of the way in which open land and woodland alike were perpetually savaged by the fellowings of greater and lesser noblemen and gentry. Archbishop Pecham of Canterbury, even, was presented before one of the forest eyres. From these abundant criminal proceedings historians of crime have constructed a picture of these gangs. Their activities on the border of legality and criminality suggest to Holt that they would constitute the primary audience for the tales of Robin Hood. However, the most authoritative scholar on this topic, J. Bellamy, from whose *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* Holt seems to have obtained a large amount of information, rejects any similarity between Robin Hood's actions and those of the criminal bands on the fringes of the aristocracy. (That does not imply, of course, that criminals would not enjoy the tales.)

Nevertheless, the ethos of the late feudal era undoubtedly contaminates (to use one of Holt's favourite terms) certain of the earliest tales, and not merely the story of Sir Richard at the Lee. The tendency of the ballad-writer or singing minstrel to address his audience as "gentlemen of free born blood", and "yeomen" is thought by the author to reinforce this idea. The first written reference to the Robin Hood stories is in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (they are favourites of Sloth the drunken priest) and the surviving printed versions are no earlier than the fifteenth century, when the terminology of "gentleman" and "yeoman" became common, following their obligatory use in court pleas after the Statute of Additions (1413). Whether these terms were used before that is unknown, but even so the aristocratic retainer implication of the term "yeoman" may not be so sure as Holt would like it to be. One of its implications was the free status of its holders, which brings us to another aspect of this book.

Running through the mass of not always digested detail is a polemical thread. Holt intensely dislikes the idea that Robin Hood could have stood for subversion – this has nothing to do, of course, with later sentimentality about robbing the rich and giving to the poor. Quite early in the book, he condemns the suggestion that Robin Hood was other than a criminal robber as "posthumous cosmetics". The author of this review wrote an article, "The Origins of Robin Hood" (*Past and Present*, 1958) whose argument was perhaps a little more complex than "sociological jargon", and, if it can be summed up in a sentence from the article itself, goes as follows: "This history of intertwined economic and social grievances, affecting rich and poor peasants, the servile, the would-be free and the free, seems more likely to have generated the Robin Hood ballads than the short-lived outbreaks of civil war, mainly affecting the upper classes". Unfortunately, in order to combat an interpretation which emphasizes the social turbulence of the fourteenth century, Holt attributes to me a quotation from himself in which he incorrectly caricatures the view I put forward. I will suggest no other lesson than that historians should be careful about their sources.

An interpretation which puts the Robin Hood ballads into the context purely of peasant discontent is oversimplified. In gathering together indications of a very varied audience, simultaneous and successive, over many centuries after 1377 – but who knows how long before? – Holt has performed a useful service. However, his hostility to "the social historian" has deprived him of what might have been a useful addition, that is, the consideration of an audience from yet another milieu. After all, four years after 1377 the turbulence of the preceding decades burst out into one of the most spectacular, if short-lived, rebellions of medieval Europe. Furthermore, unlike, for example, the dreaded Jacquerie of 1358, it had a distinct ideological orientation of which the most important single element was the demand for "freedom". This had an obvious reference to villein, or servile, tenure but it was far wider than that. Many of those involved in the rebellion were, in fact, already free, and also well-to-do. "Freedom" for them meant more than legal or tenurial status; it implied the end of "lordship". After 1413 many of them might have had the sobriquet "yeoman". Although out-of-context ontologies are suspect, it could be that the attitude of wide strata of the rural, or even of the urban, population, culminating in the demand for freedom in 1381, was similar to the later cult of the "free-born Englishman". But in his preoccupation with retainers and criminals, Holt totally ignores, in both the book and the bibliography, the husbandmen and rural yeoman who are referred to in the first fitte of the *Gest*, and who constituted at least 80 per cent of the population.

How then, one might ask, can one explain the similarity between Robin Hood's band of forest outlaws and the gentry-dominated criminal bands of the fourteenth-century countryside? Above all one must abandon any idea that this sort of literature mirrors real life. It is an illusion, the reflection of aspiration. But aspirations inevitably take shape from the experience of real life. Given the way in which minstrels, harpers and the like (well documented by Holt) presented their material, it is not surprising that they did not refer to villeinage, labour services, and taxation, but rather to a vision of free men, all friends and equals, removed from the real world, enjoying abundance without toil. There had to be a model, however, and the real criminal band provided it.

This is a suggestion of the milieu from which the audience may have come. Professor Holt is right to emphasize the existence of others, and in fact his Nennius-like concluding chapter, "The Later Tradition", shows the way in which Robin Hood, as an illusion, continued with as much strength and variety as during the Middle Ages.

To a Blind Poet in Argentina

Antique maps of this town include the ground
That's one back-garden now, part of a farm
Then, with the castle moat across the street.
Cars park all day, releasing voices
You'd soon recognize from Keats or Shakespeare,
Making for grass round the Nelson monument
Looking out to the mild Welsh frontier.

Sometimes I've dug up bits of clay pipes,
Perhaps three centuries old, but never swords,
No shields or axes. I've dug deep and hoped.
Both our sons dug much deeper. Only stones
The castle might have tumbled down have served
Our lust for something past that's touchable.
You'd listen for the haunting nightingale.

I've had to turn to what you've written
For my picture of a Saxon to come real
But now our pictures, our real pictures,
Don't suggest an iron sword. On your side
Your own seething labyrinth of cavairies
Stays underground. Fulfilment, ecstasy,
You wrote. But that was forces, and long since.

R. D. Lancaster

A bacchante and her suite

Masolino d'Amico

BRUNO CONTI and ALBA MORINO (Editors)
Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo: Vita raccontata e illustrata
350pp. Milan: Feltrinelli. L 18,000.

Sibilla Aleramo (1876–1960) was born Rina Faccio, first child of an engineer who worked in Alessandria and Milan, and then moved with his family to Porto Civitanova Marche, a small town on the Adriatic Sea, to become manager of a glass factory. His workers resented the demanding schedules he imposed upon them, and while he was busy quelling riots at gunpoint, he neglected his wife and elder daughter; the former languished and eventually tried to kill herself by jumping out of a window, the latter was raped at fifteen by an employee of her father's and then allowed her parents to coerce her into marrying him.

Rina played the good housewife for a few years, and gave birth to a son in 1895. Then, doubtless bored by claustrophobic provincial life, she had a brief affair with an unnamed "foreigner". Her husband's reaction was so violent that Rina tried to commit suicide by drinking laudanum. After this she went back to her role of passive wife, but soon became socially alert, involved herself in early trade union and feminist movements, and started working for political newspapers; for a spell (1899–1900), although her husband forced her to do all her work at home, she even edited *L'Italia Femminile*, a paper published in Milan (where her family had temporarily moved).

In 1902 she decided to live her own life. She had another love affair, this time with a poet, G. F. Damiani. This apparently gave her the necessary strength to leave her husband and son for good. She went to Rome and plunged herself into literary life, and soon found another admirer, the writer Giovanni Cena, at that time editor of *La Nuova Antologia*; he was her Pygmalion. After a period of flirting with Damiani and Cena, telling each man about the other's advances, she went to live with Cena, who called her Sibilla; and in 1906 she published *Una donna*, her first and only best-seller. She signed it with her new Christian name, and an ancient Piedmontese surname which she adopted in order to avoid trouble from her husband. *Una donna* (recently reprinted as *A Woman*, by Virago in 1979, and by the University of California Press in 1980), which told Sibilla's own story (with the exculpation, which she later regretted, of her affair with Damiani), was greeted as an important feminist document, and compared favourably to *A Doll's House*. Within a few years it was translated into French, German, English, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Polish, widely, mostly favourably, reviewed, and letters from readers poured in. Sibilla did not take advantage of her notoriety as these were her years of social commitment. Cena was a superior character and he became deeply involved in the creation of schools in the still unspeakably squalid Agro Romano; both he and Sibilla were also very active in relief work following the earthquake that took place in the South in 1908.

All this has been told more than once, notably in Sibilla's own mammoth diaries. Extracts from these, along with letters from Sibilla and from her many correspondents, now go to make up an original and thoroughly entertaining book: in *Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo* Bruno Conti and Alba Morino never waste a word, but let the documents speak for themselves. And speak they do, often irresistibly, especially from 1909 to the year of Sibilla's death.

Although at work to the end, the author of a dozen or more books – novels, mostly autobiographical, and poems – and of *Endimione*, a lyric play which was staged in Paris by Lugné-Poë (admittedly, for one night only), Sibilla seems only to have *Una donna* to support her claim to literary significance: even contemporary critics immune to her personal charm condemned her work as sub-D'Annunzian, sub-Nietzschean, oversentimental, and utterly devoid of humour. Few took her seriously at the time but her diaries are interesting, and the story of her life is quite extraordinary.

Sibilla left poor Cena, breaking his heart, in 1910. She had fallen in love with Lina Poletti, a young woman whom she met at the first Women's National Meeting. "In a few days you have become the mistress of my heart", Lina wrote to Sibilla: "and now you sit, sweet empress, in the middle of my heart, where my mother and my bridegroom have their throne." However, soon both women got over their outbursts of wild passion, and Sibilla embarked on what may be regarded as her true career: an unparalleled collection of serious love affairs with young and aspiring writers and artists, nearly all of whom would became eminent, and all of whom responded to her ardently before beating a hurried retreat. Most of them, were they still alive, would regret both the heated letters they wrote to her during their affairs, and the slippery ones they wrote to her when attempting to escape. Little could they imagine the loving care with which that seemingly bohemian, homeless Bacchante (a word which was constantly applied to Sibilla) would treasure their hasty notes, in certain cases for fifty years or more.

Within the next few years Sibilla had affairs with the poet Vincenzo Cardarelli; with the writer Giovanni Papini; with Vincenzo Gerace, poet and protégé of Benedetto Croce; with Umberto Boccioni, the futurist painter; with the painter Michele Cascella; with the writer and critic Giovanni Boine; with the poet Dino Campana. With the exception of Gerace, they would all become well known, particularly Boccioni – Boine, who died in the Great War, and Campana, who went mad and died in an asylum. Obviously Sibilla was able to spot a winner: a few years later, she seduced a young Neapolitan fencer named Tullio Bozza, who went on to win a gold medal at the Olympic games in Antwerp. Age did not deter her: she was fifty-seven when the writer Enrico Emanuelli, then twenty-four, fell in love with her; she was fifty-nine during her affair with the thirty-four-year-old poet and future Nobel Prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo. When Quasimodo left her she threw herself into the last and most intense of her attachments, to the nineteen-year-old poet Franco Matacotta, who lived with her for ten years, until 1945. D'Annunzio, the great womanizer, never became her lover, but inscribed to her one of his books as "the attentive sister, in the April evening when we suffered the anxiety of immortality". This was in Paris in 1914, when Sibilla was hotly pursuing Boccioni and tried to use D'Annunzio as bait for the younger and virtually unknown artist. In later years D'Annunzio sent her small sums of money, which Sibilla badly needed throughout her life.

A feast, then, of literary gossip, if not of literary quality – when in love, her writers all tended to sound like Sibilla. They also tried to keep to the same style when out of love and on the run, often with awkward results. "Stunned, with Arno's [so she called Papini] letter in my hand – the letter that tells me I'll have to give him up, and the tone leaves me in no doubt – I fall on the rough floor [of a peasant cottage in Corsica], wrapped in my white shawl. Poor dove!" Thus Sibilla in her diary. After telling her that his wife was suspicious, Papini tried to escape with dignity. "What saddens me most", he wrote, "is your refusal to believe that I suffer. Yes, my suffering isn't shrill, it isn't external, it neither screams nor sobs. It is a close, silent, infinite suffering – a man's suffering. And this suffering will stay within me always, and it will add itself to the others that made me a man without hope." Boccioni was more straightforward. "This obstelecy of yours to transform something that is what it is, is terrible," he wrote. Sibilla received some sober and memorable advice from Croce, who wrote her a magnificent letter when she tried to obtain his support in persuading the weakling Gerace to leave his fiancée for her. "I never believed the ideal justifications you gave in your book", he said of her earlier abandonment of her husband and son, "in the impulse of sensual and fantastic youth": "because evil is done for the attraction of pleasure, not because of theories, which are powerless to lead us into evil." "Sibilla lives with Cascella, and with Agnoletti at the same time", wrote Giuseppe Prezzolini in his diary, in 1915, "and she longs for everybody to know it; meanwhile she is trying to lure De Robertis, and she had formerly enamared Boine, who was rescued (!) they say in a hotel in Liguria, by a jealous mistress of his . . . S., who trough of Italian literature."

Sibilla Aleramo

Poor Sibilla. She delighted in her conquests, piqued when abandoned, but soon recovered and was ready for a new passion. She was certainly used much more than she used others. She always ended alone; to support herself she was often obliged to beg, from friends and from institutions. She had signed Croce's anti-fascist declaration in 1924, but after some sort of mild recantation she was given a small allowance by Mussolini.

This lasted until 1945. The following year she asked to become a member of the Communist Party. "I am now free, for ever, from loving, from loving a single one; and I live, like I used to live, *for an idea*", she wrote in her diary in 1949. Many eyebrows were raised in the PCI when the notorious literary nymphomaniac, and former Fascist, jumped on to the Communist bandwagon, but it must be remembered that few intellectuals were ready to commit themselves so completely to the Party, so soon after the war. At any rate, the Party was duly grateful, and Sibilla received all sorts of official endorsements; she wrote a column in *L'Unità*, she was a guest of honour at rallies and on trips behind the Iron Curtain; eventually she was given a flat, and her sojourn in a private clinic during her final illness was paid for by the PCI.

Sibilla died in January 1960. I saw her a few days before her death: a twenty-year-old, I accompanied an uncle of mine to her out-of-the-way clinic. He had been taken to the movies by her as a child, and he told me that she had been the first person who had made him aware of sex, although in an innocent way. When I was introduced to her – she was by then a very thin, very small, very wrinkled, yellowish thing – she said to me, "What a pity you didn't see me some time ago. Then you would have *seen* me – I was not bad looking, you know."

A city and her sickness

Nicholas Davidson

JOHN JULIUS NORWICH
Venice: The Greatness and the Fall
400pp. Allen Lane. £12.
0 7139 1409 2

John Julius Norwich gracefully disarms criticism in the introduction to this, the second volume of his history of Venice. It is not, he admits, "the sort of history Venice deserves . . . It claims only to be a straightforward record of the main political events of Venetian history, for the general, non-academic reader". The assumptions that lie beneath the claim Lord Norwich makes for his book are worth examination; human history has surely never been "straightforward". "But there", replies Lord Norwich, "every man must write his own sort of history".

Lord Norwich's sort of history is, at first sight, a familiar creature. It is born with the conviction neatly summarized on page 253: that "it is a misfortune, both for the historian of Venice and for his readers, that the tale he has to tell should be so lacking in great personalities". With, out personalities to concentrate attention, Lord Norwich has chosen to focus not on the Venetians, but on Venice. Throughout the book, "Venice" takes the place of persons; indeed, it is usually described as if it were a person – female, of course.

"Venice could sit back", we are told, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and maintain "her usual position on the side-lines". She is, by turn, "afraid", "mourning", "raging", "exhausted" and "demoralized"; it reads rather like a biography ("What Venice Did Next"). But a biographer's most delicate problem is often to explain why the hero (or heroine) sometimes failed. At the end of a life, he can normally blame old age: by the end of the eighteenth century, says Lord Norwich, Venice "had, quite simply, lost the will to live".

But where can the blame be laid when the heroine still has some three hundred years of active life to look forward to? On incompetence and mismanagement? No; it is much more charitable to blame poor health. Lord Norwich measures the health of Venice by examining her constitution, in which all institutions of government were subject to exquisitely calculated systems of checks and balances that made their misuse always difficult and usually impossible. But by 1500, "years of affluence had had their usual softening effect"; and "physical" weakness was accompanied by "moral" weakness, both demonstrated by corruption in government and by misuse of the constitution – what Lord Norwich calls "signs of sickness in the body politic". By 1540, "decline" was evident; by the 1780s, "the body politic was sick unto death." "The Fall" is blamed on poor health.

This approach to Venetian history, however familiar, still carries with it a number of disadvantages. It requires, first, that the historian should ignore, as Lord Norwich admits, "painting and sculpture, music and architecture, costume, customs and social life" – and not say much about economics or intellectual life either. And then, by making a person of "Venice", and by concentrating on abstract notions of political "health", it encourages him to neglect the executive functions of government, and to underestimate the importance of division among the governors. The main weakness of this "sort of history", however, is that by providing an explanation of "decline" that covers four centuries, it makes more detailed analysis almost redundant. The story is set in a curiously timeless context: "Venice" is a character who (apart from her physical health) never really changes; her aspirations, developed in youth, are ultimately betrayed by her agents. For it is important, in this interpretation, not to confuse "Venice" with the Venetians. "Venice", of course, is sufficient, altruistic, tolerant and peace-loving. The Venetians are opportunists, greedy, rapacious and shameless; they rely on spies, bribery and sinister intrigue.

This contrast lies at the heart of *Venice: The Greatness and the Fall*. Naturally, Lord Norwich approves of a city whose government was committed to the best interests of its subjects; but throughout the book, he betrays a lurking admiration for the less liberal methods that government often employed. On one page, he argues that to call Venice a "police state" is "a travesty of the truth" – but on another, he admits that Venice, and "virtually every other state" in early modern Europe, could be described as police states – "the principal difference being that Venice was considerably more efficient". This paradox is resolved at the end of the book, when he comes perilously close to suggesting that the end justifies the means: "There is no denying that the Ten and the Three both used spies and informers, just as every security service has since the world began; but such bodies must be judged less by their methods (unless these involve violence or the threat of it) than by the ends to which they use them".

Thousands of "general readers" travel every year to Venice to view the city and its treasures – its painting, sculpture and architecture; millions listen to its music. The politics of its past – however well told – now seem remote; but the things we can still see, hear and admire were shaped by the customs of the individuals who commissioned those treasures, and by the life style of the people who lived in that city. A book on the Venetians would be much more revealing than a book on "Venice"; and the Chairman of Venice in Peril would be well placed to write it.

Unbroken continuum

M. L. Rosenthal

T. CARMI (Editor and Translator)
The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse
696pp. Penguin Books/Allen Lane. £6.95.
0 670 36507 6

She said: 'Rejoice, for God has brought you to your fiftieth year in the world' But she had no inkling that, for my part, there is no difference at all between my own days which have gone by and the distant days of Noah in the rumoured past. I have nothing in the world but the hour in which I am: it pauses for a moment, and then, like a cloud, moves on.

This is T. Carmi's prose translation of an eleventh century poem by Samuel Hanagid, whom he calls "the first major poet of the golden age" of Hebrew poetry in Spain and indeed one of "the greatest Hebrew poets of all time". Few people will have known of Hanagid's work, the bulk of which was not published even in Hebrew until 1934. Carmi's anthology is full of such revelations. In assembling a collection that would represent the 3000 years from the poetry of the Old Testament to that of his own contemporaries in modern Israel, the editor – himself a leading Israeli poet, who modestly (but regrettably) omits his own work from these pages – has performed a great service. The prose renderings, each printed facing its Hebrew original, are a fine achievement in themselves. The years of compilation and research have, however, resulted in something even more remarkable: the first presentation of the body of a continuous tradition in a single, coherent, absorbing volume.

The word "miracle" is justly used by Carmi in his introduction when he speaks of the crucial discovery, in the late 1890s, of the Cairo Genizah ("hiding place"):

This momentous event – momentous for almost every branch of Hebrew scholarship – has been aptly described as a cluster of miracles. It was a miracle that the community in Fostat (Old Cairo), which . . . bought its synagogue in the ninth century, perpetuated the . . . Palestinian rite. It was a miracle that they . . . held the written word in such esteem that any piece of writing in Hebrew . . . had to be stored in a special lumber-room. It was a miracle that hundreds of thousands of fragments were deposited . . . from the eleventh to the nineteenth century [and] were preserved from decay and were not discovered prematurely.

In 1896 "two ladies from Cambridge" bought some of the manuscripts as mementos of Cairo and, on their return, showed them to Solomon Schechter, Reader in Rabbinics at the University. Schechter "realized, to his amazement, that he was looking at a fragment of the Hebrew original of Ecclesiasticus" and "immediately travelled to Cairo and, with the permission of the keepers, crated some 100,000 fragments and shipped them to England". Thereafter began the publication of these fragments, and their piecing together with other manuscripts that had "somehow stolen out of Cairo before Schechter's arrival" and into many collections in cities all over the Western world. Almost half the material is poetry, much of it as yet unedited. There can be little doubt that the Genizah and other manuscript collections hold many more revelations in their undeciphered leaves." The achievement of great poets such as Hanagid and Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/22–1055), forty of whose poems were first published some five years ago, has, therefore, fully emerged only in recent times; others, hitherto unknown – Yannai (sixth century?), for example, and many anonymous authors of striking poems – have been resurrected from that rumoured past, of which Hanagid wrote:

Behind the continuing miracle of retrieval, of course, is the miracle of the unbroken continuum of Hebrew poetry through centuries of exile and dispersal, expulsion and repression, massacre and partial assimilation. As Carmi notes, "its main centres were in Palestine and Spain, Babylonia and Italy and Germany and Eastern Europe. But it also had important branches in North Africa, the Balkans, Yemen and Holland." The periods of development in these main centres overlap and become intertwined with the stages of poetic style in each of the dominant cultures: Arabic, Iberian ("Andalusian"), Provençal, Italian, and so on. How intertwined may be seen in the description of Hanagid,

born in Cordoba and . . . among those who fled the capital when the Berber hordes destroyed it in 1013. A renowned Talmudist and statesman, he was the first Spanish Jew to be granted the title "Nagid" ("Prince"). He was appointed vizier shortly after the accession to the throne (1038) of Badis, the Berber ruler of Granada. In this capacity [he] commanded the armies of Granada in a series of victorious campaigns . . . Hanagid's vast knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic culture is apparent in his . . . rich repertoire of forms and motifs.

As the poem I have quoted shows, Hanagid's deep sense of history and of the paradox of identity has, like so much of the poetry in this book, a sharply modern polyphony, combined with a tradition rooted in Biblical and liturgical origins.

Many questions of literary scholarship, and possibly much controversy, will inevitably be raised by this anthology. But the venture is thoroughly justified by the ancient Hebrew saying, "It is upon us to begin the work. It is not upon us to complete the work." And indeed, this sort of work can never really be completed. It should be read as a sequence by many hands, one that proceeds from the passionate primitivism of the Bible – with its savage war-songs, and its notes of compassion and holiness as well as eroticism – through later phases of widening sophistication and tragic awareness. The remarkable poem "You sold a brother", for example, by the eighth-century poet Phinehas Hakohen, recasts the tale of Joseph confronting his brothers in Egypt as a dramatic dialogue in haltad form (not unlike "Edward" in this respect) between Joseph and Judah. The psychological turn at the end exploits the initial charge of emotion in Joseph's accusations and in Judah's terrified pleading, and gives enormous power to the dénouement.

. . . And he said, "I am your brother Joseph!"
They shuddered at his words. They shook, dumbfounded, and could not answer him. Then he wept aloud, and they too wept. *And afterwards his brothers talked with him.*

Hakoken was also one of the authors of the imposing series of poems on the death of Moses written between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. These poems brood on death and destiny by way of a number of confrontations between God, who has decreed Moses' death, and the unwilling hero, seen as a Promethean figure – and by way of other forms of stark dialogue. In them we can see something like Greek tragedy in formation, the fusion of self-regarding piety and defiant questioning that we find in both *Oedipus* and *Job* and in so many later poems in the Hebrew tradition. (A simple example is the anonymous "You shall not withhold your answer" – a list of commandments to God: instructing Him in the ways of mercy and understanding, and admonishing Him to abjure the premises of Original Sin: "You shall not prolong Your anger with Your sorrowing people to all generations.")

The most affecting quarrels with God – sometimes almost violent, sometimes as gently acquiescent as Abraham and Isaac, whose tale becomes a bitterly ironic symbol for later generations – come in poems centred on the mass-slaughter and mass-suicides of Jews during the Crusades. Whatever romance those expeditions may hold for some, they were sheer butchery for the Jewish people. "I shall speak out my grief", an anonymous poem about the massacre of Jews by Crusaders in Mainz on May 27, 1096, reproaches God for a moment, reminding him of the legend of Isaac, before turning to self-questioning:

Almighty Lord, dwelling on high,
in days of old the angels cried out
to You to put a halt to one sacrifice. And now, so many are bound and slaughtered – why do they not clamour over my infants?

Brutality and horror break into many of these poems. "Let this sight come before You", David bar Meshullam of Spayer tells God: "young women, who put their trust in You, slaughtered naked in broad daylight; the fairest of women – their wombs slashed open and the afterbirth forced out from between their legs." One cannot help reading these dark poems as essential clues to the continuity of Hebrew poetry, carriers of terrible memories that it would be sinful to forget, and as challenges to poets to honour the possibilities of their art and not sink into triviality or mere anecdote.

It is not possible to convey here the enormous range of poetry in this anthology: the gradual evolution of liturgical verse and its several styles and verse-forms; the growth of secular verse from these liturgical origins, and the divergences of national and regional schools; and, most of all, the special qualities of particular poems of every kind. Carmi's introduction, his notes on individual poets and poems and on medieval Hebrew genres, and Benjamin Hrushovski's lucid "Note on the Systems of Hebrew Versification" are extremely apt and informative, and the book's overriding concern with poetry of quality rather than poetry that is merely representative of periods and schools is of decisive importance.

This is a book that opens up a world of poetic art and history. If anyone wishes to quarrel with its choices or emphases – well and good, I have rarely read anything so much worth arguing about.

Endangered species

George Szirtes

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS
Naming the Beasts
61pp. Manchester: Carcanet New Press. £3.25.
0 85635 432 5

Classical-romantic-pastoral in his youth, as he says of himself in his well-known "Epitaph", John Heath-Stubbs is an elegant and ironic conversationalist: things have changed but not that much. What delights us in Heath-Stubbs's poetry is the fluency with which he switches from assured speech to emblem and back again in a fully civilized manner. The longing for exoticism at the heart of things is still strong, as is shown by his employment of "gallant" diction, biblically sensuous or almost *Boy's Own* heroic, where the "honest mistle-thrush" can remain "brave and true" or where "a sweet-voiced nightingale" can tell a Persian rose of Nishapur where "a thousand roses bloom, / Glowing like lanterns". But the mind that conceives these images has a Chinese complexity and dignity. As the Dinosaur says to St George, "Linguistics in our Mesozoic age . . . had not, I think, advanced / To that degree of subtlety". ("St George and the Dinosaur"). This is a Dinosaur to be reckoned with.

Naming the Beasts continues to tread carefully among its ironies. That he is archaic the poet is pleased to admit – but only in the sense that he is aware of himself as an endangered species. In fact the whole familiar world is endangered. In Central Park, New York, he asks, "Where is the Washington Square of Henry James?" Not, assuredly, where "a drove of joggers / Plods round the park's periphery, / Like startled cattle fleeing / The gad-fly spectre of cholesterol". Not where "the little children, imprisoned in ogrish towers" are "enchanted by a one-eyed troll in front of a joyless fire" ("The Green Man's Last Will and Testament"). These criticisms of modern life are understandable but also rather absolute. We can only answer, Yes we know, we know, but what is to be done? Against this, Heath-Stubbs's vision of nature, an exotic version of Hampshire; rich with groves of magic and learning, is in the line of English late pastoral, with something of Palmer, something of Edward Thomas. It is touching because of its fading familiarity. In a poem called "Greensleeves" Haath-Stubbs begins with a litany of flowers, contrasta it with industrial cities ("White faces in slum alleys") and ends by being moved to tears (tears hedged with ironies of too much wine and British Rail fare) by the sight of Kentish apple-blossom: "'I am called Lady Greensleeves,' she said, / 'I also can betray and break the heart.'"

It is because it can betray and break the heart that Heath-Stubbs's poetry holds true. His is a proverbial wisdom based on traditional romantic perceptions, transformed by flourishes of wit: Sade, during the Reign of Terror, "really could not bear / All that beautiful, valuable pain / Simply going to waste"; poems which, if they were Cadillacs, "poets would probably / Drive them to the public mischief"; and, in defence of his own generation, the new poets who are "Dot-and-carry Long John Silvers with small dried up / Professors perched upon their shoulders. / At least", he adds, "our parrots had real and gaudy feathers."

Some of those feathers may be gaudy, it is true. There are indeed some thin specimens in this book, and one at least, "His Excellency's Poetry", is an old bird with a new date attached to it. Yet it is a fine collection, the best of which is to be found towards the end. Next to a Heaney or a Muldoon, Heath-Stubbs seems loquacious, but what a pleasure it is to hear his sweet and civilized voice.

Jobs

I sit on, trying to think of something,
in spite of jobs ripening around me.
Light drives down, settles impeccably
in stiff volumes on the stone tiles,
until the plant she brought to convalesce
is loaded with light.
I'll study the flaring stems
holding the pale steady light
in liquid capillaries,
Instead of making a grab to the heart
fixing it as a totem of something,
I'll leave it as a few minutes
participating, learning to husband.

Alan Dewar

Not passion, but politics

Erich Segal

RICHARD C. MONTI
The Dido Episode and the Aeneid: Roman Social and Political Values in the Epic
114pp. Leiden: Brill. Fl40.
9 004 06328 5

She is arguably the most enduring heroine of the ancient world. "Love-sick Dido" seems to have captured Shakespeare's imagination. The tale of her tragic affair with Aeneas was Hamlet's favourite play. It was England's first opera. Louis XVI was so moved by the version he saw at Fontainebleau that he made the actors immediately repeat it twice. There have been nearly a hundred operas on this theme, mostly eighteenth-century Italian, and usually called *Didone abbandonata*. Matthew Arnold ranked her with Achilles and Prometheus as "independent of time", belonging to "the domain of our permanent passions". Clearly, Virgil's star-crossed lovers have had an even greater appeal than Romeo and Juliet.

And the story is Virgil's, though he did not "create" Dido (she had long existed in Phoenician legend), and did not even invent her encounter with Aeneas (this was probably in Naevius' third-century epic, the *Bellum Punicum*). But Virgil took figures from a tapestry of myth and infused them with life and exceptional passion. Indeed, the intensity of Book IV sets it completely apart from the rest of the epic. The poem's ostensible subject is *arma virumque*, yet our abiding memories of it are of love and *Liebestod*.

That is, until now. For if we believe Richard C. Monti's thesis, we must temper our sentimental reactions and, unlike St Augustine, cease to weep over Dido's fate. While not denying that there is considerable emotion in Virgil's narrative, he argues that the queen is essentially "a political person", and "the norms of behaviour which regulated Roman political relationships are the same ones which inform the association which Dido enters with Aeneas and the Trojans". Professor Monti sees her not as a romantic princess of the Hellenistic mould, but rather as a Roman (*sic*) dynast, so depicted by Virgil "to establish a standard against which Aeneas may be judged".

Monti supports his argument by demonstrating the enormous amount of Roman political terminology in Virgil's narrative. A similar approach has already been tried by D. O. Ross, whose in *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (1969) explains the metaphorical significance of political language in the epigrams to Lesbia. Both Ross and Monti bolster their arguments with frequent references to J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la république* (1963). With this book in one hand and a Latin dictionary in the other, Monti retraces the lovers' steps to show us aspects we had previously missed.

Virgil begins the story when Aeneas, separated from his men after a shipwreck, enters a sacred Carthaginian grove, enveloped in a magic cloud. There he first sees *pulcherrima* Dido addressing members of his lost crew. Ilioneus, one of his captains, tells the Punic queen that their leader was Aeneas, renowned for valour and *pietas*. His speech, says Monti, is a formal request for *hospitium*, "the proper designation for the association of individuals of different political states . . .". When Dido accepts the homeless Trojans, Aeneas reveals himself and addresses her in terms that suggest that he too is "entering the relationship of *hospitium*" and will be regulated by its norms.

So far, there is nothing extraordinary about this. At first, they are merely royalty conversing in the appropriate manner. Many a passionate affair has begun under the most formal circumstances. When Romeo appears at Capulet's banquet, Juliet's father restrains Tybalt from ejecting him, because Romeo "hears him like a portly gentleman". This is Veronese *hospitium*.

Monti's argument continues:

> The introduction of the political theme into the love narrative of Book IV with the suggestion repeatedly made at the beginning that the marriage with Aeneas has political implications and that it will be advantageous to Dido points to an essential feature of her character. Her typical mode of behavior is that of a political person.

But where does Dido make this explicit? It is her sister Anna who voices concern about Carthage's precarious international situation as Dido waxes on about love. Yet to demonstrate Dido's awareness of the political implications of an alliance with Aeneas, Monti quotes IV 3–5:

> multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat
> gentis honos; haerent infixi pectore vultus
> verbaque, nec placidam membris dat cura quietem.

Thoughts of the man's *virtus*, the nobility of his lineage keep rushing to her mind. His face, his words are graven deeply in her heart. And her *cura* gives no peaceful respite to her body.

Yes, one can find numerous political connotations for *virtus* in the pages of Hellegouarc'h. But one can also simply translate its primal meaning, "manliness". And though *cura* can mean non-specific worries, in this context, as is usual in Latin love poetry, it means "love-pangs". More significantly, Monti does not quote the two preceding verses which open the book and set its tone:

> at regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura
> vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.

But the queen, long afflicted with the pains of deep passion, feeds the wound with her blood, and is consumed by an unseen inner fire.

This is traditional (Greek and Roman) erotic language; flames, the "wound of love", etc. And Virgil frequently employs conventional amatory terminology to emphasize the intensity of Dido's love. We are constantly hearing echoes of Lucretius' vivid cautionary description of sexual passion. But Monti never once mentions Lucretius or the memorable passage in Book IV of *De rerum natura* which could be a proleptic account of Dido's experience.

In their fiery last encounter, Dido, about to be *abbandonata*, pleads with Aeneas to remain, then rails at him when he refuses. Here again Monti quotes only lines congenial to his thesis. For example, when she reminds Aeneas of her *hospitium*, new ungratefully abused by his breach of *fides*, Monti feels that "Dido speaks in the manner of a Roman dynast, and she censures Aeneas according to a specifically Roman criterion". He cites lines 323–26 in which Dido implies that "she would rather kill herself than fall prey to her political enemies". But Monti steps one line short of a memorable if sentimental plea, which reveals much about the nature of Dido's feelings: "if only I had a child by you, a *parvulus* Aeneas whose face would remind me of yours . . ." (327 ff). This tender moment marks the only occasion in the entire epic that Virgil employs a diminutive adjective: "a tiny little Aeneas", or "a dear little Aeneas". Surely the poet's primary intent was to express the sorrows of Dido not as a woman of state, but as a woman of flesh and blood. It seems to have struck his Roman audience that way. When Ovid retells the tale in *Heroides* VII, Dido thinks she may be pregnant. Is this a world of broken treaties or broken hearts?

It is all a matter of how you read the dictionary. One can, like Monti, believe that when Dido appeals to Aeneas' right hand (eg *dam dexterа quondam*) she is asking him not to breach "*fides* in personal political relationships". But one could also believe that she is referring to *dextrarum iunctio*, the joining of hands in the Roman marriage rite. And since *she* regards their relationship as *connubium*, the latter interpretation seems a bit more likely.

Every analytical method will prove fallible if its practitioner is too doctrinaire. (In a discussion of phallic symbols, Freud is said to have remarked, "sometimes a cigar is simply a cigar".) Unlike Humpty Dumpty, the literary explicator cannot make words mean whatever he wants them to. *Dextera*, *fides* and *foedus* do not *always* refer to political alliances. Hellegouarc'h himself observes "Dans la langue érotique, le *foedus*, c'est le serment d'être fidèles l'un à l'autre que se prêtent deux amants." And he cites not only Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid, but *Aeneid* IV 520.

A second aim of Monti's study is to demonstrate how events early in the *Aeneid* are paralleled in later scenes. Virgil subtly adds nuances to these thematic and verbal echoes to make some significant points. Monti quite rightly notes that Ilioneus' appeal to Dido for *hospitium* is re-echoed in Book VII where he makes a similar plea to King Latinus (even the physical settings are almost the same). But since repetitions in Virgil are not mirror-images but variations on a theme, the little differences add a great deal. Most significantly, the Aeneas for whom *hospitium* is now being requested is a different man after, among other things, his traumatic experience with Dido. This time *hospitium* will in fact lead to marriage, but not love. And this paradox reinforces in retrospect the hero's sorrow at losing Dido.

As for politics, the *Aeneid* is, of course, filled with topical references, not all as oblique as those Monti finds. The entire poem is a hymn to Augustus and the Julian *gens*. After all, Virgil was being paid for his poetry and had literally to sing for his supper. Servius records that after he read the elegiac lines about the dead prince Marcellus before their imperial majesties, Octavia swooned and Virgil collected "a chunk of money" (*aes grave*).

There are unmistakable allusions to the civil wars and, at one point in Book VIII, a subtle comparison between Dido and Cleopatra (which has led, unfortunately but understandably, to a spate of tortured reinterpretations of the whole poem). Monti is not wrong in seeing politics in Virgil's Carthage. The Punic Wars, of course, are endowed with a mythological origin in Dido's final speech. But the entire story of Dido and Aeneas can hardly be viewed as political. When we read the *Aeneid*, especially Book IV, we must never forget that Virgil's amanuensis was named Eros.

Neglected no longer

Richard Stoneman

MICHAEL C. J. PUTNAM
Essays on Latin Lyric, Elegy, and Epic
354pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £21.20 (paperback, £5.60).
0 691 06497 0

Augustan Latin literature has not gone short of critical comment. That Michael C. J. Putnam is conscious of this may be surmised from his predilection for the less discussed portions of his authors. Having chosen a neglected poem – neglected perhaps because of its simplicity (Horace *Odes* 1.10, 1.20) or even dullness (his first note to the essay on *Aeneid* III in effect admits this) – he is then faced with the problem of finding something to say about it. Clearly he does not always find this easy; much of his discussion consists of paraphrase and platitude, enlivened by some sharp observations (the character-drawing of Horace and Lydia in *Odes* 3.9, the metaphor of Catullus' love as a flower touched by the plough) and improbable collocations. He often draws attention to the sonorities and assonances that are so plangent in Virgil, so enchanting in Horace, so luminous in Catullus, that no one reading the poems aloud can miss them: he has also the dubious gift of detecting symbolic interplay in the use of words such as "rock" and "limb", in different grammatical combinations, in widely separated poems.

Paradoxically, Putnam's most original and interesting essays are on those poems already much written about. His discussion of Horace *Odes* 3.30 takes nineteen pages to re-state the blending of Greek and Roman elements, a task accomplished in essentials by Gordon Williams in two. Elsewhere he is less attuned to the Greek backcloth against which the Roman poets inescapably played out their dramas. He is thus inclined to underemphasize this aspect of Catullus 64 or of Propertius Books III and IV. Rather than seeing the poems of the latter, like M. E. Hubbard, as a more or less conscientious, but failed, attempt to write Callimachean *Aetia* on Roman subjects, he sees it as the application of Propertius' "bitter melancholy" to the uncongenial task of writing Roman poems: the Roman themes, for Putnam, are equivocal at least, and Propertius in damning Augustus with faint praise.

Catullus' poem 64 is likewise analysed as a personal, confessional document: it is an autobiographical study in code. At one point Ariadna is Catullus – but so is Aegeus – for de not both look out to sea, weeping? In Catullus, Jupiter does not begrudge Thetis to Peleus, and this reminds Putnam of Lesbia's claim in poem 70 that she preferred Catullus to Jupiter. The passage on Achilles causes him some trouble, until he remembers that Catullus' brother, like Achilles (and Protesilaus, in poem 68) died at Troy. It is illuminating to point to the predominance of themes of loss and departure in Catullus' long poems; to say that Catullus based all this on one loss in his own life is to reduce the dazzlingly varied poet whom Putnam professes to admire to a monomaniac. One might as well argue that Ovid's life had been blighted by a series of lovers who turned into trees, or that Montevardi, composer of the *Lamento d'Arianna*, suffered exactly the panga Catullus once did. Putnam is clearly much taken with Catullus' own claims of *castitas* and *pietas*, and not inclined to consider the literary, Callimachean ring of such claims.

The essay on Virgil's first *Eclogue* contains a useful discussion of the meeting of ideal and real in Virgil's pastoral world, which for once avoids engaging with the minutiae of Augustan land-redistribution. Putnam shows how both Meliboeus and Tityrus exemplify a failure in that Epicurean *ataraxia* or tranquillity the pastoral existence should promote: the one is faced with immediate loss, the other lacks the self-knowledge to see outside his paradise and appreciate it; the idyll is crossed with irony.

On scholarly and critical grounds there seems little justification for this re-assembling of this mixed bag of essays. The student would be better served by the inclusion of the three most illuminating in collections of the best recent essays on, respectively, Catullus (already done by Kenneth Quinn in 1972), Pastoral and Propertius. The rest are ephemera.

In *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodoros, Priscus and Malchus* (196pp. Francis Cairns, The University, Hull HU6 7RX. £12.50, 0 905205 07 3) R. C. Blockley presents the historiographical background to these four writers and offers new conspectuses of the fragments, together with full notes, a bibliography and an index of quotations and citations. The full texts of the fragments, with translations, will form the subject of a later volume.

Aldous Huxley on war and intellectual survival

Naomi Mitchison

The present extraordinary state of affairs – I knew nobody who agrees with Government policy; where do all the MORI poll people live? – has reminded me of an earlier age of anxiety, when, in a state of misery, shame and fear, I wrote to my old friend Aldous Huxley. It was October 1938, just after Chamberlain had come back from Germany with a peace which betrayed Czecho-Slovakia and gave Hitler time for a further buildup, and the consolidation of his death camps. A great many people, especially mothers with small children, were dreadfully frightened of war; it wasn't nuclear weapons in those days but gas which scared us silly.

I didn't want Aldous to *do* anything; I didn't know myself what any of us ought to do. I had hoped that the will for peace in the European democracies would bring in an era of conferences instead of war, but that hadn't happened: "all it has done", I wrote to Aldous, "is to make the governments see that the people will stand *anything* rather than war." I foresaw conscription, censorship, official lies, general loss of liberties. I added; "It's getting increasingly difficult to think of the Nazi government and not of the people of Germany: one is beginning to hate a whole people for the sins of its governments, and that way the old madness lies." Appeasement was a respectable term, so used for instance by *The Times*. I couldn't feel it was right and yet I couldn't bear the thought of war – both Aldous and I had lived through World War One, the horrors and the lies and the dreadful deaths of our friends. So I kept asking: what do you think? "Mankind has come to a crisis where none of the old formulae work; everything is on too big a scale. Physics has done to psychology." The following is the letter Aldous in California sent me in answer:

> Dearest Naomi,
> I have just got your letter – as despairing as most letters at the moment and as most conversations, for that matter, even here, at this distance. The position during the crisis time was such, it seems to me, that there was nothing Chamberlain could do that was not morally wrong and immediately or potentially disastrous. It is the story of the Sybilline books. The longer a bad job like the post-war international situation is left, the higher the price that has to be paid in order to settle it. In the end the price to be paid is practically infinite and there is nothing not-fatal that can any longer be done. I still think that, in the existing circumstances, Chamberlain's choice between evils was the better one. It seems to me better that the five million or more people who would have been killed in a war should have their lives prolonged if only by a short time. It seems to me better (a) because life in itself is valuable and nobody has any right to decree the cutting short of millions of the lives of his fellow men, (b) because it is theoretically possible, albeit psychologically improbable, that Chamberlain may be able to use the time gained to work for a more lasting solution by non-violent means, (c) because even in the lives of people who are no more active than Mr Micawber things do sometimes just "turn up" and the potentialities of accident, even of happy accident, are enormous, (d) because most people, as I have had experience of this, would prefer to be alive under a tyranny to being dead under a democracy in "process of being transformed into a tyranny by war or revolution" – these are not very heroic sentiments but, heroic or not, they are commonly held and I believe that people's wishes in a matter so important to them as this should be consulted; for the more heroic spirits tyranny is intolerable; but after all there are always escapes, through suicide, through revolt and through that liberation of the soul which has been preached by Buddhists, Christians and Stoics alike – and which can be achieved. It may be of course – and after all practically every philosopher has said so, except during the last two and a half centuries, when people believed in the existence of human progress as an analogue to technological progress – it may be that this kind of Epictetan, Spinozen, Taulerian liberty is the only kind of liberty attainable by human beings. It may be that, given people with ordinary, unsublimated human appetites, one is mad to expect that any decent political régime can be more than transitory.
>
> As a matter of historical fact, the only tolerably decent political régimes that have lasted any great length of time have been theocracies like India and Egypt, in which people accepted the philosophical traditions and social habits current in their neighbourhood as though they were of divine origin, and where, in consequence, a crust of custom had formed, guaranteeing a certain amount of reciprocal forbearance and making harsh acts seem equitable, because traditionally sanctioned. As Bertie Russell points out in his new book on Power, any society which indulges in searching criticism of hallowed beliefs and institutions automatically breaks through that crust of decency and prepares the way for the use of naked and entirely cynical power. The political cynicism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries followed the criticism of the humanists (the spirit of Erasmus is the head of a process of which Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia are the inevitable tails); the frightfulness of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars follow the criticisms of the Encyclopaedists; our own frightfulness follows the termite labours of psychologists, novelists, legisticians and so forth gnawing away the axioms on which nineteenth century life was founded. There has never been a period in history, as far as I know, when a society has succeeded in combining for any considerable length of time free criticism of traditions with political decency; for political decency has always been bound up with the acceptance of the traditions, and the end of one has always meant the end of the other. It looks as if the same thing were happening now as has happened so often in the past. These considerations make me extremely doubtful of the possibility of achieving anything by means of large-scale political movements. To my mind the most promising economico-social experiments being made at present are experiments along the lines of those conducted by Borsodi and others for the purpose of improvelog the techniques of subsistence living. Democracy and personal liberty are possible only where a considerable proportion of the population are economically independent, where neither plutocrats nor the state can bring economic pressure to bear on them. True, in a society where the crust of custom has collapsed, neither plutocrats nor above all the state will hesitate to bring naked military pressure to bear; so that even this experiment seems probably foredoomed to failure. Still, it must be tried, if only because it offers some hope of providing little islands of existence for isolated communities of refugees from the general cataclysm. For the rest one must fall back on the cultivation of the art of inner liberty. There is nothing else.
>
> I moulder along quietly here, having been condemned by the doctors to a régime of twelve hours rest per day, owing to the after-effects of a pneumonia last spring, which I haven't yet been able to throw off. In the intervals I work – did what they call a "treatment" of the life of Mme Curie for the film and am now at work on a kind of novel which attempts, not only to describe human antics, but also to explain them in terms of a general theory of entics; which tells a kind of story and at the same time tries to analyse the assumptions we make every time a story is told; which builds with verbal and anecdotal bricks that are taken to pieces in the process of being laid. An attempt will be made to synthesize on a more acceptable psychological and linguistic-philosophical basis. I have not got very far and it will take a long time, and perhaps in a world like this the effort will be completely wasted. Still, I think the task is intrinsically important and the attempting of it is the only thing I'm qualified to do; so I tinker away at it.
>
> Ever yours Aldous

Aldous Huxley in the 1930s

Not exactly a cheerful letter and yet I must have found it in some way helpful, or why did I hide it away? I think the real heart of it was that here was someone who, in this situation which was tearing all our assumptions to bits, could settle down to think and work and let the storm blow over him. And perhaps, on another branch of the tossing tree, I could do the same.

Aldous Huxley's letter © 1982 Laura Huxley.

Nations in negotiation

Hedley Bull

ADAM WATSON
Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States
239pp. Methuen. £9.50.
0 413 48190 5

No important book has been written about diplomacy – either in the narrow sense of the work of the diplomatic profession, or in the wider sense of the management of international relations by negotiation – since Harold Nicolson's classic work of 1939, *Diplomacy*. Yet in the intervening years there have been vast changes in the nature of diplomatic activity, and much controversy about the role it can play in international affairs.

This role is generally believed to have diminished. If diplomacy is the conduct of international business by negotiation, then it can take place only when tensions among states are at a certain level; above which negotiation is impossible and beneath which it is unnecessary. On the one hand, in international relationships marked by deep-seated and protracted conflict, diplomacy gives place to political warfare; it was Nicolson's lament that this had happened in the inter-war years. On the other hand, in relationships marked by a high degree of intimacy and mutual involvement, like those among the states of Western Europe, diplomacy may sometimes give way to international technical management; the role of the military, economic and other experts who assemble in the councils of the West is not, strictly speaking, to negotiate (although in practice this is what they often do) but to find solutions to common technical problems.

Where diplomatic activity does survive, it is less the special domain of professional diplomatists than once it was. Ministers from different governments meet directly and bypass diplomatic representatives; officials from the domestic departments of one government meet with their opposite numbers in another, without going through foreign offices; resident embassies decline in relation to ad hoc missions, or even to telephone calls; bilateral diplomacy – the traditional *métier* of the professional diplomatist, and the only proper setting for confidential negotiation – gives place to multilateral or conference diplomacy which, even though today it is still often conducted by the professionals, calls for different kinds of talents from those which traditionally they have been thought to have. Because diplomatists, like Oxford dons, have inherited some of the trappings of a more gracious age they offend against the democratic temper of the times; the idea that the work they do, and not merely their clinging to the trappings, is obsolete, carries a ring of self-evident truth. Suggestions, like those contained in the Duncan and Berrill reports, that embassies, ambassadors or their expense accounts should be cut down to size find a ready audience.

Adam Watson's admirable book provides a defence in depth of the rôle which diplomacy, in the broad sense of "the dialogue between states", has played and can still play in relation to international order. His central theme is that diplomacy can and should be the instrument not simply of *raison d'état* but of *raison de système*; to the hands of a Richelieu, a Talleyrand or a Bismarck it has served not simply to advance the objectives of a particular state but to develop, maintain and strengthen the international order itself. At its best it has been not only a civilized, but "a civilizing process", identifying the common interests of international society (as most notably in the maintenance of a balance of power), defining the rules by which these common interests are advanced, and adapting them to changing circumstances. It is never a mere instrument of power (which is not the meaning of Frederick the Great's statement that diplomacy without power is like an orchestra without a score) but is always creative; it is not morally neutral, but proceeds always from a moral conviction; it does not operate only within given premises, but "points the way ahead" – even the way beyond the system of states itself, if this is where the way to a more viable international order is thought to lie.

Professor Watson does not make the mistake of identifying diplomacy with the form it has taken in modern Europe, or of treating distinctively European diplomatic institutions, such as the resident embassy, as sacrosanct. If modern European diplomacy is the most developed, the most self-aware and the most imaginative known to us, and commands special attention because it is in fact European diplomacy and not American, Asian or African that today provides the basis of diplomatic forms throughout the world as a whole, it is nevertheless the case that the most fundamental conventions of diplomacy can be found in relations between Egypt and the Hittites, among Greek city states and Hellenistic kingdoms, in ancient China and India and among communities of Australian aborigines: the immunity of envoys, formalism of behaviour that enables contacts to continue when relations are strained, and language that is precise but tactful and flexible.

Thus it is quite wrong to argue that non-Western states today experience some cultural barrier that causes them to disregard the conventions of diplomacy, just as it is foolish to argue (as Third World theoreticians have very occasionally done) that these conventions are part of the apparatus of imperialist oppression. While Third World states through their numbers, their cultural diversity and in some cases their inexperience have brought great changes to diplomatic life, they are themselves vitally interested in diplomatic rules and procedures, being in some respects not less but more punctilious than Western states in their observance of protocol, which they see as a proof of their statehood. The Iranian government, as Watson points out, even as it connived at the violation of United States rights in the Teheran hostage crisis, carefully respected the immunity of other embassies and of those diplomatists who eventually negotiated the release of the hostages.

Perhaps this book by an ex-diplomatist pitches the claims of diplomacy rather too high. Diplomacy at its best will reflect *raison de système* but in the normal case will obey only *raison d'état*. Diplomacy may be creative and civilizing, but only where circumstances allow it to operate. It is not clear how far what was called the "collegiality" of the diplomatic profession in the European international system of the last century really survives in the global one of today, or whether the work of international organizations, which now looms so large, can properly be considered diplomacy. But Adam Watson's study of this subject is the most penetrating we have had for many years.

The haunted conscience of comedy

Peter Conrad

L'Amour des Trois Oranges
Glyndebourne

For Glyndebourne's new production of *L'Amour des Trois Oranges* (wittily sponsored by Cointreau), the designer Maurice Sendak has built a toy theatre where illusions can be tested and occult games enacted. Sendak's speciality as an illustrator is a world of infantile hauntings, whose bogeys and ogres are exorcized by laughter. His comedy is a recourse of nervous alarm: laughter is the sound of scepticism cheering itself up, bravely resisting the appeal made by Peter Pan and refusing to believe in demons. So it is in Prokofiev's opera, the action of which is prescribed as an antidote to the Prince's despair; yet when he does emit a self-alleviating staccato cackle at the sight of Fata Morgana's underwear he finds himself to be not released from his trauma but sentenced to suffer through another by way of expiation. In laughter therapeutic, as the court physicians propose – the relief, like sneezing or sex, of an irritation – or is it only a gallant self-deception? Do we laugh because we're happy or because we're frightened?

Sendak the sinister comedian answers Prokofiev's questions by designing phantoms which are ludicrous precisely because they're terrifying, and which we anxiously placate by choosing to find them funny. An inflatable Fata Morgana tumesces as the character's mid is invoked, growing with gruesome vegetative speed until her yellow body, plumped out with hot air, threatens to burst through the proscenium. She's no cartoon but a dirigible monster, and an exhalation from everyone's fantasy: What gaucously sustains her is our credulous fear of her. There's a similar superstitious grotesquerie to the giant cook in Créonte's palace, with his stupefied circling eyes and pendulous, slavering tongue. Appearing soon after the dinner interval, he's a cannibalistic remonstrance to Glyndebourne's well-fed customers, who patronize him with their laughter until they realize – from the severed human limbs being shovelled into his incandescent maw – that it might be his intention to ingest *them*. The blow-up witch and the mechanistic glutton whose stomach is a furnace are triumphs of Sendak's spooky puppetry. His first costume for the ailing Prince (Ryland Davies) is equally creepy. The character wears a body-stocking inscribed with an anatomical diagram, over which the physicians pore. The costume sees through him, X-raying his diseased organism (which may after all have incubated these imaginary horrors). Like Freudian jokes, the Prince's skeletal suit is a glimpse into a sick interior.

Sendak's wizardry is magnificently abetted by the conducting of Bernard Haitink, who makes the pit an underworld of menace and mental recusancy. The conductor's temptation might be to play *L'Amour des Trois Oranges*, with its heraldic fanfares, its musically hiccuping laughter and its brazen march, as an exercise in rhythmic virtuosity. Haitink avoids this obvious course, and treats the music as the haunted conscience of the on-stage comedy. The orchestra tells truths which the drama seeks uneasily to laugh off. The helium inflation of Fata Morgana is matched by a crescendo which accumulates in and erupts from the pit; though the Prince's malady may look absurdly causeless, the orchestra at the beginning of Act II gives a clamoying and empathetic diagnosis of it in an episode of hawkish dissonance which pulses between enervation and febrile urgency. Haitink is at his most demonic in the card game between the magus Tchelio (Richard van Allan) and the war-whooping Fata Morgana of Nelly Morpurgo; as they vanish in couple behind the screens, yelping Dionysiacally or growling in volcanic fury, the orchestra is lashed through a mad scherzo. It's the music of the distempered id – a psychological nocturne, its grotesquerie as maimed and unsettling as Elektra's dance or the deadly comedy in Mahler. As well as darkening what the director Frank Corsaro calls a shaggy-dog story into a grimly prescient nightmare, Haitink locates in the hectic score intervals of lyrical deceleration and grieving pathos such as the lament of the King (Willard White) for his son or the expiring high soprano plaints of the thirsty princesses when they emerge from their orange carapaces.

Corsaro's production capitalizes ingeniously on the opera's interrogation of its own illusions. The presence of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe signifies, here as in *Ariadne auf Naxos* or *Turandot*, the ironic invasion of opera by self-disbelief. The work comes equipped with its own guerilla band of nay-sayers. More radically still, Prokofiev's prologue, in which a rabble of competing factions in the un-stage audience variously demand a comedy or a tragedy, jokes or tunes, and resolve their differences by breaking into fist fights, shows the operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk* to be a chaos of disputatious, divident aims. When the King prescribes theatrical galas to divert his son, he acknowledges what Brecht saw as the culinary triviality of opera.

Thus encouraged, Corsaro turns the prologue into a satiric review of Glyndebourne's repertory. To appease the crowd, a series of placards offering each of the operas being performed this season is raised aloft; every one of them is jeeringly dismissed. And when *L'Amour des Trois Oranges* is finally settled on, the tenor, miffed, stages a small tantrum and refuses to assume the role of Prince. Like Sendak and Haitink, Corsaro moves in and out of the illusion, deriding its fragility and falsity, yet at the end discovering in it a proleptic dread and institutionalizing its daydreaming violence in a political reign of Terror. He has set the work in a Picpaesque street-theatre during the French Revolution, and just as the revolution consumes its offspring so the operatic illusion, however flimsy it may seem, persecutes and executes the participants in its charade.

When the opera ends, the Prince and the Princess, rather than being acclaimed, are pelted by the spectators. Fata Morgana returns, carrying a miniature guillotine to whose honed mercy she commits the fatuous royal actors. She's attended by a pair of body-builders, who have flexed, pumped and postured their way through the opera, man-handling heavy items of scenic furniture; now, as well as her paramours, they become emblems of the physical power she has attained, muscular totalitarian monoliths. The Prince's illness was a real one after all. *L'Amour des Trois Oranges* is presented as the prophetic bad dream of an expiring class – or rather three such classes under sentence of death: the aristocrats of 1789, those of the Russia Prokofiev left after the Bolshevik coup, and those who happily applaud this premonition of their own demise in the Glyndebourne stalls, and have an orange hurled at them by Corsaro during the curtain-calls. That uneasy, mocking march is played on the way to the scaffold.

A drawing of his wife by John Henry Fuseli, to be sold at Christie's on June 15.

Delicate deceits

Harold Hobson

The Understanding
Strand Theatre

Angelin Huth's *The Understanding* marks something of a departure in the career of Sir Ralph Richardson; and it is rare indeed that an actor should take a step so startling when he has been in the very top flight of his profession for forty years, and more. He has never in living experience been surpassed or even equalled in the portrayal of ordinary men who, through trial and despair, have won their way to a kind of almost supernatural glory, whether when in the conquest of fear he walked into the unknown in J. B. Priestley's *Johnson over Jordan*, or, in R. C. Sherriff's *The White Carnation*, in the moment preceding their death together in an air-raid, he discovered and demonstrated by the slight pressure of a hand the wonder of his love for his wife. Anything base or mean is a stranger to him; and it takes one quite a while to realize that the genial, friendly Leonard whom he plays in *The Understanding* has, in their sumptuous London mansion, been deceiving his wife for the whole of their married life. For there are three sisters, all living under the same majestic roof, and Leonard, like Dickens, but with a greater ease of bearing, a larger gesture, and, most strange of all, an untroubled happiness and unfailing courtesy, has married the wrong one.

There are things in *The Understanding* which are more familiar. Richardson makes a spectacular entrance, through a centre door, in morning clothes, striped trousers, and top hat. He carries this off with great bravura, but it was done before by Ronald Squire in Somerset Maugham's *The Breadwinner*, and the young girl Kate (Sylvestre Le Touzel) who bursts into the household and transforms its old-fashioned dignity into a garden of swinging mobiles is not too distantly related to Hilda Wangel; except that she is welcomed by the dying wife, Eva (Georgina Anderson) who perhaps has not been deceived, after all. For her last words to the girl are "Have fun". They are the same as those of Hortense Schneider, the original of Zola's Nena, who had indeed throughout the eighty years of her exuberant frivolity had the fun that Eva, without Leonard's even noticing it, had not.

Reminiscent in parts though it may be, the play has at the opening of the second act, a scene of such absolute magic that one's breath is taken away by its beauty, delicacy, unexpectedness and pathos. Kate offers to dance for Leonard, and one fears that what is to follow will be banal and embarrassing. On the contrary it is something of light and glorious sadness. As she weaves her way, with long-extended arms, amongst her absurd mobiles, Kate, with a mixture of coquetry and gentle pity, recalls Eva's last words, marking them with the faint taps of her dancing feet, as haunting as the beating of a distant drum: And the exquisitely cruel thing is that Leonard is quite unmoved. Richardson has not shown us such cruelty since his Dr Sloper in *The Heiress*; and Dr Sloper's cruelty was not ignoble; it was the other side of his passionate affection for his wife, who too had died, but not, like Eva, unwanted.

In the end Leonard is free to run away with Acton, the sister he has always loved, who should have been played by Celia Johnson; her part is now taken with great sympathy and wayward affection by Joan Greenwood. Miss Huth points no moral; but, as the lovers roll away in Leonard's dashing sports car, full of exultant liberty, Kate scatters a handful of fallen leaves. One remembers that; however long and splendid the banquet, the bill will be presented, and must be paid at last. This is a moving and a troubling play, of great achievement and more promise. My colleagues have underrated it as cruelly as the first production of *The Birthday Party*.

Details of the Ilkley Literature Festival (July 12-17) may be had from June Oldham, Programme Director, The Festival Office, Ilkley, West Yorkshire LS29 8DG; tel 601210.

A hangdog heir

Robin Buss

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman
Gate Cinema, Notting Hill

Christopher Petit's film sticks reasonably close to the plot while perversely undermining the spirit of the P. D. James novel from which it is taken. Her heroine, Cordelia Gray, was a young woman who found herself, almost by accident, cast in a role we usually associate, even in detective fiction by women writers, with Belgian epicures, aristocratic dilettentes or tough-talking San Franciscans. The reader was asked to enjoy her triumph over the murderer precisely because it was at the same time a triumph over the expectations of most of the other characters, demonstrating that women are not necessarily unsuited to this, or for that matter any other job. Not only is that message obscured in Petit's film, it vanishes to the point where one might think he accepts the preconception implicit in the title.

His Cordelia, played by Pippa Guard, certainly looks competent enough and reacts without hysteria to the suicide of her partner, Bernie Pryde, the private eye whose detective agency she inherits. From this genuine act of self-destruction, she is called to investigate the apparent suicide of Mark Callender and, where her counterpart in the book develops a profound but professionally justifiable interest in the dead boy, falls idiotically in love with him. This motif Petit reinforces by introducing a scene where, for no good reason, she tries to reconstruct the suicide, finishes hanging from a beam and is only narrowly saved from following Mark and Bernie to a totally unsuitable end for a heroine. Except when being attacked by villains, P. D. James's Cordelia managed to keep her feet firmly on the ground.

So Petit, having discarded the heroine in all but name, forgets the very English setting of the novel and plunges us into the sinister atmosphere of a Chabrol thriller. Cars glide silently through the landscape, accompanied by doom-laden music, conversations are overlaid with the whirring of unseen helicopters and most of the action takes place in semi-obscurity. Mark's father (Paul Freeman) is the head of an industrial empire, but it is Billie Whitelaw as his secretary who does most, by her brooding presence, to suggest the corruption of the family, and the skeleton in its cupboard. With her around, casting heavy-lidded glances of suspicion at everyone, Cordelia seems redundant and the progress of her investigation incidental to the discovery of the crime. Indeed, when she almost succeeds in replicating the victim's death, she appears to be trying to confirm the coroner's verdict and it is left to the secretary to find the clue which throws doubt on Mark's suicide.

Nonetheless, the film is often successful in its own terms, which are those of the French cinema rather than the English detective novel, and there are some moments of real suspense. There is a neat hint at the beginning of the importance of the victim's blood group; but, apart from this, Petit is not interested in the mechanics of the investigation, and even character is made secondary to the atmosphere which he compounds of incidental music, landscape and Billie Whitelaw. This is, enough to keep us watching with pleasure until the ending which, for anyone who has not read the novel, is probably indecipherable, and not only because it is played in all-but-total darkness.

John Cage at seventy

Wilfrid Mellers

Incredulity is our inevitable reaction to the news that John Cage is seventy; and the incredulity bears on what he "stands for", since for the past half century his activities, or sometimes non-activities, have been a protest against our "Western" obsession with the ego and the dimension of Time within which it must be manifest. Throughout the ages occidental artists have made artefacts that attempt to freeze moments in historical time, and through them to mould those who live among and follow after them. Cage has become "less and less interested in music, because a composer is simply someone who tells other people what to do. I find this an unattractive way of getting things done. I'd like our activities to be more social and anarchically so."

Even back in the 1930s and 1940s, when Cage could still be accounted a composer, he dispensed with the European dimension of harmony, which marked alternating degrees of tension and relaxation existing in time; and produced music that was purely monodic-melodic or percussive. Even in his keyboard pieces for prepared piano he displayed (as Schoenberg, who briefly taught him, dismissively pointed out) no awareness of Western harmonic "consciousness", substituting for it the preordained, variously serial linear and rhythmic patterns of oriental cultures. Listening to his "Sonatas and Interludes" for prepared piano may induce trance; but the trance leaves us saner, calmer, more at one with ourselves, the world, and whatever one calls the absolute. Cage seems, however, to have felt that there was an element of cheat in his applying eastern techniques of order to his American environment, or at least to have believed that there were more radical implications in his denial of post-Renaissance Will. Oriental and primitive arts often involve chance processes that may be relevant to us, regardless of time and place. The tossing of coins and dice, the shuffling of sticks, the noting of imperfections of paper, may free us from the tug of memory and the pull of desire; and since memory is the past and desire the future we are thereby released from chronometric time. The acausal synchronicism of I Ching was for Cage a divinatory technique; a piece such as his "Music for Carilloo" – in which the serrations and therefore sounds on the carillon will were devised on the principle of paper cut-outs, is unadulterated magic.

Since numbers are pre-existent to consciousness, it's not fortuitous that chance led Cage on to an unambiguous trust in the instinctual life. When we have learned to have faith in what we hear, see, feel and smell, "works" of art will have became unnecessary. Instead we'll have "a purposelessness or a purposeless play"; which is, however, "an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos or to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and desires out of its way". The ultimate philosophical statement of this position is in Cage's notorious silent piece, "Four minutes, thirty three seconds", wherein a pianist sits immobile at a piano for the prescribed period, while we as audience listen as we've never listened before to the sounds we call silence. "They change . . . but if I were to feel that one of them didn't please me or wasn't suitable for me, then you could immediately see why such a notion of preference is illegitimate, since in fact the sound did occur."

In all his recent activities (I evade the word "works") Cage invites us to make our own music in aurally experiencing the world around us, the process being simultaneously an opting out of selfhood and an opting in to the environment we're part of. The two new pieces presented at the first concert of the Almeida Festival neatly epitomize this unified duality. "Inlets" opts out in the sense that four "players" dribble water within various-sized conch shells, passively accepting the slowly shifting patterns the electrophonically amplified sounds create. They end we enter a state of trance, as we do when listening to Cage's prepared piano pieces of thirty years back. The difference is that then Cage invited and ordered the quite complex sounds, whereas now we do, as we listen to the ways in which chance or god or nature dribbles.

The other and much bigger piece is an opting *in*: for in *Roaratorio* Cage celebrates James Joyce's centenary by making his own Wake out of Finnegan's. Chance structures the piece in that throughout its hour and a half durnion Cage reads passages from *Finnegans Wake* selected by the chance process he calls mesostics. Even if the words were audible, which they mostly aren't, they would thus be denied even the dream-like sequence and consequence they have in Joyce; Cage describes the piece as a Circus, thereby emphasizing the circularity rather than linearity of the concept. As he reads – and the intonations of his voice are themselves music – the audience circumnavigates the auditorium, picking up now one, now another, of the sound-strands emitted by multiple electrophonic speakers. The tapes "superimpose seventy-two layers of sound from places mentioned in the Wake". The babel of bars, the yells of babies, cats and dogs, amorous or murderous cries in the night, the gurglings of the river Liffey and what could be (who but Cage knows?) the bubbling of vats of Guinness assail our ears, making the environment within which we live, move and, "for the Time being", have our Being. Though we are not called upon to make choices between these sounds, there is a further aural dimension which complicates the situation. It is this complication that makes the total experience richly rewarding.

Dotted around the hall are a number of live musicians, representatives of Irish folk culture: a singer, a fiddler, a flute-player, a piper, two drummers. These folk musicians intermittently create their "musics of necessity", which spring from the lives they've led in the contexts of tradition but which, going on, become at once historical and eternally present. What they make is not the artefacts of Western "works" of art but a *continuum*, existing within the flux we're surrounded by. That they endure makes our awareness of chaos peculiarly poignant. I found that I kept listening to the superb Joe Heaney singing his age-old but ever-young songs, wishing that I were allowed to give him my undivided attention. Yet I recognize that in so doing I was, from my Western heritage, missing Cage's point: which is that I haven't the right to, not having known Joe's world or lived his life. If today we can achieve an act of praise it can only be from the midst of chaos; and Cage's eldritch but benign grin, when pseudo-silence finally succeeded the sounds he'd unleashed, proved that such jubilation is at least a possibility.

Most of us aren't prepared, or perhaps aren't courageous enough, to relinquish moral choice and the splendours and miseries that men through the ages have made incarnate in their artefacts. None the less "the Cage phenomenon" was necessary and has earned our gratitude; there aren't too many people around whose presence makes us feel spiritually, if not "morally", better. Two little glosses on *Roaratorio* may serve as characteristically paradoxical epilogue. Of the live Irish musicians two, having undermined modern technology by missing their plane, failed to turn up, and had to be presented vicariously on mechanized tape. John Cage, on the other hand, timeless old wizard that he is, ended the ceremony at the scheduled hour, precisely in the minutel The warp and woof of chance and intention, eternity and time, remain infinitely mysterious. In a sense one can regard (but not dismiss) Joe Heaney and Beethoven, the mewling cat and wailing babe, the ancilling skylark and the scrunching truck as transitory accidents. As Samuel Beckett, another clown-saint, who *is* Cage's contemporary and Joyce's disciple, put it: "I hear a murmur, *something gone wrong with the silence*".

Losing our heads

Andrew Hislop

Britannia Hospital
ABC Cinema, Shaftesbury Avenue

Lindsay Andarson's *Britannia Hospital* is both poignantly topical and curiously dated. The use of the National Health Service as a screen or stage metaphor for the state of the nation is hardly new; and the society satirized in David Storwin's screenplay would be quite at home in those social burlesques of the British cinema in the 1970s and late 1960s. Indeed, more at home: the agit-prop radicals are straight out of Red Lion or Grosvenor Square and are much too long in the tooth (and politically too red in claw) to play the juvenile leads in any Brixton or Toxteth production of *The Fire Raisers*. Media heads vacate their minds with joints pregnant with "Afghan" and magic mushrooms plucked by their own hend from exotic, foreign parts. Even Royalty is represented by the trusted old guard – the Queen Mother. (Princess Di only gets a moment's look in from a poster. The inclusion of a dwerf – once *de rigueur* in all but the most *vérité* of avant-garde cinema – and a man in drag as representatives of the Palace is not a shocklingly novel treatment of an institution noted for its miniatures and outlandish costumes.)

The nefarious transplanting inclinations of the mad surgeon reflect recent history only in so far as they are influenced by the film *Coma*. Otherwise, this creator of a composite human monster (motley of pigment and topped with Malcolm McDowell's purloined head) and an artificial brain prone to cosmic platitudes, could easily swap his own part with that of any number of evil cinema boffins. The length of the union leaders' hair is certainly post-*I'm All Right Jack* but it would sit comfortably on any shoulders squaring up for an industrial dispute during the last decade. The workers down tools, up arms, sit in and walk out with traditional hypocrisy, comic humourlessness and scrupulous attention to the niceties of semantic definition – "We're not men, we're staff" insists an Asian spokesman for some male porters. And the British telephone system is distinguished yet again by its inability to connect anyone to the number dialled.

Were it not for the obvious ageing of those who have appeared in all three films and the odd minor sociological pointer (new model of Mercedes, royal pin-up, telephone etc) you might almost think that *Britannia Hospital* was made before Lindsay Anderson's other, cinematically more adventurous, comic critiques of British society, *If* and *O Lucky Man!*

However, the familiarity of *Britannia Hospital* does not lessen its relevance for us, still less its enjoyment. It is intermittently very funny, if somewhat stomach-turning in its humour. The preparation of a *soupe de cerveau* with a Magimix and a wobbly specimen of human grey matter is particularly sickening in its hilarity. The large cast of accomplished character actors, headed by Leonard Rossiter, Graham Crowden and Joan Plowright, provide some delightful passing portraits of the curiosities which form British society, but then we are convinced that the country is populated with such oddities because they are continually being presented to us in our sitting-rooms by accomplished character actors. Alan Bates has a brief, silent lie-down part before having his head sawn off for a transplant, Arthur Lowe is allowed a few noble pomposities as a dying Foreign Secretary. Marsha Hunt looks beautiful as a nurse and tries her best to conjure an appropriate emotion when the chopper disturbs McDowell's piece of mind.

The weakness of the futuristic elements of the plot, which take place in the ultra modern research centre next to the crumbling Britannia Hospital, makes it uncertain what an appropriate emotion would be. The emotional force of the film comes not from a fear of the future but from the only too recognizable frailties and absurdities of human behaviour.

With a National Health strike threatening, the contradictions of hospital workers withdrawing their labour is of immediate moment (even if the medical services are primarily a symbolic vehicle): *Britannia Hospital*, though, bashes not only unions but all elements of society and shows how a concern for the trifling conflicts of human manners easily gets confused with more weighty and violent struggles. It ends with the whole gamut, radicals and royals alike, suspending hostilities while they listen to the voice of the future from the artificial brain.

But, whatever its intention, the film does not make the earlier conflicts seem irrelevant in the face of this future. Rather, it confirms the survival of old social problems in the age of the silicon chip. It is dated not because it includes veteran protesters – they exist and have much to protest about – but because it ignores in its social microcosm the culture of the now disaffected, the teenage unemployed. They do not even get to storm the gates of Britannia Hospital, let alone to sit with the Queen Mother listening to the pains of the future saying "What a piece of work is man . . . How like a God . . . How like a God . . . How like a God."

A century of English ritual

Oliver Taplin

Aeschylus' 'Persae'
Bradfield College

If there are any anthropologists among the thrushes that defy the showers of late May which threaten a certain disused chalk-pit in the secluded green valley of the Pang to the west of Reading they will have a special interest in a triennial ritual held there. This gathering has been going on for a long time, since 1892 in fact. People converge from far and wide to sit on rough steps up the banks of this much overgrown excavation, where they rustle their waterproof fabrics and watch a group of youths in colourful costume declaim and sing and even dance. Clearly it is a very English ritual. Some bright-eyed storm-cocks may even have spotted that it is not strictly a "ritual", in so far as the performance changes every three years; this year for the first time ever there is even a young female participant.

The very first Bradfield Greek Play was put on in the Dining Hall in March 1882, and contributed notably to the craze for Greek plays in the 1880s (a craze which reached its peak with the young Jane Harrison's triumph as Alcestis at the New Theatre, Oxford in 1887). The school magazine recorded the scene: "the lights in the room being lowered, the curtains of the portico are drawn back and disclose Apollo (F. R. Benson) all radiant . . . Mr Benson's pose was all that could be desired . . ." As an undergraduate Benson (dubbed Sir Frank in the Royal Box at Drury Lane in 1916) starred as Clytemnestra in the very first revival in ancient Greek in Balliol College hall in June 1883 (Cambridge, Mass. followed in 1884; Cambridge, England in 1882). Soon after, when Jowett the Master of Balliol was Vice-Chancellor, OUDS was founded on condition that the repertoire was restricted to Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, and that ladies took the female parts – a step which Bradfield has taken a century to follow.

In ancient Athens a good *choregos* would spend a lot on arranging for his chorus to have an extended period of intensive rehearsal. One ket to the success of the National Theatre's *Oresteia* was the months of rehearsal for the whole company. But it does not take a monumental Arts Council grant for a boarding school to rehearse a troupe of boys long and hard. And the chorus is, indeed, the speciality of the Bradfield plays: the discipline of their movements and the clarity of their enunciation are most impressive. This may be one of the considerations which led the Director, Christopher Stace, to choose this year, for the first time, Aeschylus' *Persae*, the oldest tragedy in existence, first performed in 472 BC.

There is no making a typical tragedy of it. It is set in Persia a mere six or seven years in the past; it has no direct family conflict, the stuff of so much Greek tragedy; there is no catastrophe during the play – instead, it brings home to Persia a disaster which happened months before and far away in Greece. It is a play of national desolation. Great lists of strange names are intoned: the roll-call of the confident Persians who set off and have not returned. The chorus of elders sings how the whole of Asia has been brought to its knees as they look on the figure of King Xerxes kneeling in defeat. Yet Aeschylus does not caricature or ridicule the Persians; never do they deteriorate into the equivalent of the strutting toy Nazis who even now meet grotesque come-uppance in cinema and sitting-room.

Aristophanes arored a shrewd hit in his *Frogs* many years later when he had his stage-struck Dionysus recall the grand old *Persians*: he cannot remember quite who it was who was going on about whom or why, but he recalls with delight how the chorus clapped their hands and shouted "iauoi". The Bradfield production does not shirk the outlandishness of it all; there is no attempt at a token naturalism, and the oriental colouring is stylized rather than tamely antiquarian. The chorus, convincingly middle-aged if not old, goes through a vigorous range of choreography, swinging their vivid green costumes (which are not quite morning-coats). They are the sounding-board for strong and clear performances from the Queen Mother (the revolutionary girl), the advance messenger, the silvery ghost of Darius, a kind of Ayatollah Commendatore, and finally, in blood-stained tatters, the battered puppy-king Xerxes. All in all it is a clear, careful production, confidently spoken and visualized. Yet through and through it is an English ritual. May the Bradfield Greek play flourish as long as there are thrushes in the Berkshire chestnuts and beeches.

Pathetic Portuguese

Patricia Craig

From the Balcony
Cottesloe Theatre

The Portuguese Letters of 1669 is a work of fiction written in the epistolary mode, the supposed author being a nun in the grip of an ineradicable passion. Elaborate pleas and recriminations go out from the convent to the unnamed soldier who seduced the sister and then deserted her, in the usual way of the rapacious cavalier. The nun, who acquired the name Mariana in the nineteenth century, is allowed neither a character nor a story but exists merely to communicate a mood: highly-wrought despair.

You cannot make a drama out of a series of exclamations, however heartfelt, or recollections of lost bliss, however exquisitely painful. Patrice Chaplin, the author of this adaptation, has searched the literature of the last century for an appropriate male voice to accompany the outcries of her Portuguese nun, and come up with Pechorin from Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. The result of this unlikely amalgamation is a couple of disjunctive monologues: lyrical hand-wringing at one side of the stage, calculating lustfulness at the other. Neither deprivation nor surfeit leads anywhere.

Morag Hood makes a picturesque nun, and Leigh Lawson a strapping cavalier, but they can do little with material so limited and repetitive. We know the nun is inconsolable, and the soldier jaded; no need for these conditions to be endlessly expressed. Unimpassioned dejection does not make the nun seem less banal: I think I heard her observe at one point, "A week sun fills the well-behaved space with a lemon light", though I cannot be sure of this. Too-literal translation, or an attempt to be poetic? It is difficult to tell.

ENTERTAINMENTS

Fifty years on: Auden's 'Orators'

The TLS *of June 9, 1932 carried the following review by A. C. Brock of* The Orators *by W. H. Auden:*

It is not easy to describe this extraordinary composition. It is written partly in verse, some of which is deliberately free from poetic diction, and partly in prose, some of which is poetical.

In the main the work appears to be an ironical and satirical description of life in England today. But Mr Auden's approach is oblique, capricious and, as it were, from a distance; he breaks the ordered world of usage into fragments which he employs both to make a singular pattern of images and conceits, and also, with a satirical intention to display the malign absurdity of organized society. Incongruities and odd juxtaposition are both his artistic medium and the weapon of his irony. Some of his jokes are simple and high-spirited, but more often he moves in a tangle of allusions and images between which the natural connexions are omitted. He delights in modern slang and technical diction which is so new that it has not had a chance to acquire a literary flavour, finding as much pleasure in these difficult and prickly terms as most young poets take in the diction of the old masters. In fact, the words which he seems to like most are those calculated to knock a sonnet to pieces, not only the technical terms of wireless, aviation, or war, but even the hidden indecencies of vulgar speech, of which he uses a good many. He is insolently but exhilaratingly new, both in his technique and in the matter of his writing.

For, it should be said at once, Mr Auden's composition is not at all silly. Although it is obvious that this disintegrated poetry, and still more this "surréaliste" satire, might be one of the easiest of all forms of writing, a mere dribble of disconnexions, and if it were so would certainly be one of the dullest, this work is neither of these things. On the lowest level it is very clever, and Mr Auden's mind works with a fascinating agility. Conceits, parodies, and allusions flow in an unceasing stream from his pen. But, what is more, none of these are in the in the least perfly sophisticated or embarrassing. He never attempts a callow epigram. It is important to recognize this at once, for this is the most common characteristic of such bright young works, and only a mind which is really sincere and an artistic conscience which is really scrupulous can avoid it. This is not to say that Mr Audeo's frequent railings and his persistent air of disgust with all the complexities of modern life may not sometimes grow tiresome, but he never commits the artistic faults which commonly go with such elaborate sophistication. To make a revolutionary manifesto written in violently unconventional and unliterary language sound as well tuned, almost as discreet, when it is read as a whole, as an old-fashioned essay oo some safe literary subject is obviously an unusual feat; and it is certainly something which no one but a genuine writer could do.

For Mr Auden's message displays the most thoroughgoing contempt for all possible conventions and for the general organization of human life. In the "Journal of an Airman" he describes measures of hostility against safe and organized society so reckless, so violent and so capricious that they are surely beyond the imagination of any political revolutionary, although, to be sure, he concludes with the observation that he has made a terrible mistake and that "the power of the enemy is a function of our resistance", so that the only way to remain unspotted from the world is by complete passivity and retirement. And yet, however strident his message, it is always of second importance to the progressiod form of Mr Audeo's composition. In his verse he chiefly uses elaborate metres, not unlike those of Gilbert, and twists and turns them with a fascinating effect. And both in his poetry and his prose the quality of his diction, the adjustment of strange images and the fall of the sentence, have obviously been throughout his first concern. If his message, his exuberant relish for the new, have led him into any fault, it is only this, that we could wish that he had sometimes aimed more deliberately at beauty and had not always sought to come upon it slyly and obliquely.

Author, Author

Competition No 74
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than July 2. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing that the most nearly correct – in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, Times Literary Supplement, PO Box 7, Gray's Inn Road, WC1X 8EZ. The solution and results will appear on July 9.

1 Amidst the horrors of that dream I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated; galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable sense of despair about the future. Motive there was none why I should try to recover or wish to live; and yet quite unendurable was the pitiless and haughty voice in which Death challanged me to engage his unknown terrors.

2 He dreamed a long, troubled dream . . . He stood on a raised stage, under his own loom; and, looking up at the shape the loom took, and hearing the burial service distinctly read, he knew that he was there to suffer death. In an instant what he stood on fell below him, and he was gone.

3 This August I began to dream of drowning. The dying weot oo aad on in water as white and clear as the gin I drink each day at half past five.

Competition No 70
Winner: Hubert Morley
Answers:

1 When tobacco came, when Raleigh did first bring
The unfabled herb; the plant of peace, the known king
Of comfort bringers, then indeed new hope
Came to the host of poets.
Ivor Gurney, "Tobacco".

2 I could say what I know of the virtue of it, for the expulsion of rheums, raw humours, crudities, obstructions, with a thousand of this kind; but I profess myself no quacksalver. Only thus much, by Hercules, I do hold it, and will affirm it, before any Prince in Europe, to be the most sovereign, and precious weed, that ever the earth tendered to the use of man.
Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*, II, 2.

3 Browning does not smoke; it is his greatest defect – but he tells me that Tennyson does excessively – and that after he got to Florence on his way to Rome, he was so disgusted because he could not find a particular tobacco he liked that he turned back to England & never went to Rome.
William Wetmore Storey, letter to James Russell Lowell, August 10, 1853.

to the editor

The Harris Case

Sir, – Much as I dislike replying to a review, Anthony Holden's misrepresentation of my book, *Mrs Harris: The Death of the Scarsdale Diet Doctor* (May 14), cannot be allowed to stand uncorrected, not in a responsible journal.

Mr Holden insists that ("whatever else she may say") I wrote my book out of a feminist zeal that blinded me to the fact that Dr Tarnower had been deprived of his life. This is simply untrue. In my report of her trial I clearly dissociate myself from the many women in America and elsewhere who felt that in shooting her faithless lover Mrs Harris was a cultural heroine, redressing the wrongs done to her sex. My chief emphasis as I describe Mrs Harris in court is on the actuality of Dr Tarnower's death and Mrs Harris's manifest wish to distance herself from this physical and moral reality: I remind the reader that while her lover is dead by her hand, Mrs Harris is alive, fighting for her freedom, and I speak with horror of her ability to handle Tarnower's blood-stained sheets without apparent emotional affect and to hear, seemingly unmoved, the chilling details of his final moments. Indeed, my conclusions about Mrs Harris's mental condition are essentially based on my daily observation of her "denial" that she caused Dr Tarnower's death.

Mr Holden writes: "Mrs Trilling closes, again on behalf of the Daughters of the American Revolution, by disagreeing with the verdict." Conviction for murder rests on proof of *conscious* intent. I disagreed with the verdict because, like most of the reporters at the trial, men as well as women, I did not believe that conscious intent had been sufficiently proved – my point is strictly a legal one. I do not know what Mr Holden *thinks* the DAR is: the left wing of female liberation? I hasten to assure him that its concern is with another revolution and that as the daughter of East-European immigrants I am not qualified to speak in its name.

Finally, Mr Holden quotes both Anthony Powell and William Hazlitt in his review. This is fair enough except that he gives no indication whatever that these quotations come out of my book rather than his own head. On the other hand, he writes: "The only man cited as any kind of social parallel, in a passage mumbling about people killing tha things they love, is Oscar Wilde." My single mention of Oscar Wilde appears (p220) in the following sentance which I quote in its entirety: "Wit isn't a useful instrument of defense; it may make a short-run appeal but it creates a backlash – one saw this in the Hiss case and the Oppenheimer hearings; certainly one saw it in the trial of Oscar Wilde."

DIANA TRILLING.
35 Claremont Avenue, New York City.

'The Mathematical Experience'

Sir, – Jonathan Lear (May 28) and J. M. B. Moss (June 4) seem to suggest that I have been misleading in certain respects, in my review of *The Mathematical Experience* (May 14). I feel that I cannot let their letters pass without comment.

With perhaps some justification, Lear takes me to task for referring only to three viewpoints: formalism, Platonism (or realism) and constructivism (or intuitionism). I appreciate that there is a wide variety of attitudes that can be taken in mathematics and admit to adopting (with some relief) this oversimplified (but not unreasonable) division of possible opinion that was presented in the work under review. However, I strongly take issue with Lear's assertion that Gödel's argument does not directly support Platonism. To deny mathematical Platonism in any form is to deny that the truths of (say) arithmetic have an absolute validity independent of human culture. But what "truths" are the informal proofs of the Gödel type actually "proving" if not such as these? Like any other convincing mathematical argument, such reasoning helps to persuade us of the truth or falsehood of some clearly defined proposition – a truth or falsehood that it is evidently not up to us to decide but merely to discern.

I do not deny that some may take exception to this viewpoint (such as Moss's Gödel-Immuna formalist who refuses even to call 2+2=4 "true"). But the working mathematician is continually being confronted by the apparently absolute nature of mathematical truth. Only with very large infinite sets do possible uncertainties begin to creep in. Aristotle denied the completed infinity, and the present-day constructivists may be regarded, in this respect, as his heirs. Their viewpoints separate into many different strands, a few of which I do have some sympathy for. (Lenr refers also to Hartrey Field, whose expressed views I could argue strongly against if called upon to do so.)

Some comments on Moss's highly misleading letter (following his own paragraph numbering):

(1) My use of the vague term "led to" no doubt covered a multitude of sins, but for Frege to have remained uninfluenced by Cantor's revolutionary 1874 paper, by the time that he produced his own book ten years later, would indicate an insensitivity to the prevalent mathematical thinking that I find hard to credit. I do not assert that Frege *agreed* with Cantor (or with the "formalist philosophy") but his concept of cardinal number displays a strong familial relationship with Cantor's "power" of an infinite set. Certainly Cantor strongly influenced Russell, and Cantor's proof that there is no largest infinity led Russell directly to his paradox.

(2) I do not deny that others before Hilbert attempted "formalist schemes, but it is customary to use the term "formalism" only for the much more comprehensive viewpoint arising out of Hilbert's concerted programme (though I should guess that Hilbert, like Frege before him, was philosophically a realist). Hilbert was unquestionably strongly influenced by Cantor.

(3) My statement about the intuitionist's attitude to the occurrence of 100 successive 7s in the decimal expansion of π comes directly from a lecture given by Brouwer which I attended some thirty years ago. No doubt many present-day constructivists take a softer line, but that does not invalidate my point.

(6) A geometry can legitimately be defined axiomatically since it is a self-contained structure. But set theory has to serve for the whole of mathematics. For a set theory "to exist" in my sense it is not sufficient that its axioms be consistent. In particular, any Gödel proposition asserting its consistency must also be as acceptable as any of its axioms. We do not yet know whether non-Cantorian set theories can allow this.

ROGER PENROSE.
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The Ethics of Abortion

Sir, – The debate in these columns over whether a foetus is a parasite is getting a little silly. When I observed in *Abortion and Moral Theory* that "pregnancy is a parasitic relation" I did not regard myself as having discovered a novel class of parasites to which biologists might wish to give their attention. Rather, I was attempting to focus attention on features integral to the relation between foetus and mother which should influence the way in which we perceive and think about abortion. One of the problems we face in puzzling over abortion is the lack of an exact parallel elsewhere in our lives to the foetus-mother relation. This fact led me to propose as one model (not the only one) the relation between parasite and host.

How close is the parallel? If recent correspondents to these pages are to be believed, a parasite–host relation exists where (1) the parasite is lodged in or on the body of the host, (2) the parasite is metabolically dependent on the host, but not vice versa, (3) the parasite is harmful to the host to some degree, and (4) normally (though not invariably) parasite and host are heterospecific. Pregnancy easily satisfies the first three conditions, though it departs from the norm in the fourth. This lit seems sufficient for concluding that the parasite–host relation is an illuminating model for the foetus–mother relation, and that we do not gratuitously insult foetuses by regarding them as parasites.

L. W. SUMNER.
4 Southmoor Road, Oxford.

Subsidizing Magazines

Sir, – Reviewing *Modern Poetry: East and West*, James Kirkup concluded (May 14), "One could wish that there were more courageous international ventures like this one. There have been a number of attempts to produce a truly international magazine . . . . Most of these are now dead or dying. This anthology is a unique undertaking, and deserves all the support and encouragement we can give it, both practical and financial."

Without wishing to steal any limelight from Wong Wai-Ming's hundredth issue, may I point out that *New Departures* is a remarkably similar undertaking for oil that it stems from British soil, and is alive and kicking for all that it suffers a glaring lack of support or encouragement "in its own country"?

Your own paper is, or at least was, an honourable exception to this: in the *TLS* of August 6, 1964, the early issues of *New Departures* were described as constituting "the most substantial avant-garde magazine in Great Britain". The editorial of the same issue held that "the difficulties encountered by so stimulating a magazine as *New Departures* are lamentable, and would hardly have been so severe in any other western country". It went on to prescribe the obvious remedy: "What is really needed is a more open-minded attitude on the part of the literary establishment."

But the situation since then has got steadily worse, not only for *New Departures*, but also for *Aloes, Ambit, Agenda, Atlantic Review, Curtains, Global Tapestry, Oleander, Poetry Information, Resurgence, Stereo Headphones, Straight Lines, Trigram, Writers' Forum*, and many other struggling internationalist magazines and little presses – and not only because of recession and inflation. I read Kirkup's piece a couple of days after receiving a note from Charles Osborne, Literature Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, telling me that *New Departures* has once again been unsuccessful in its application to the Council for grant-aid. I've had the same letter every time I've applied, throughout the twenty-three years I've been editing and publishing.

Yet the amounts my fellow missionaries and I have requested have been cheeseparing in the extreme. This time I'd asked for £1,250 to £1,500 for 1982/3 – an exiguous fraction of the £875,000 allocated to literature. Our self-styled Literary Commissar has regularly kept this total annual amount down to less than it could have been – and *millions* of pounds less per annum than has been claimed by any of the other AGGB departments – on the ground that he knows of insufficient "meritorious" literary enterprise in need of support!

The most recent issue of my magazine managed to publish seventy-two texts by forty-two poets from fifteen countries, including Ireland and Japan, as well as "some of the Russian exiled and 'samizdat' poets" whose absence from the *East and West* collection was regretted by Kirkup. And I would hope that, unlike "the large British contingent" your reviewer found "*déjà-vu*" and (compared to Wai-Ming's Americans) "academic, provincial and plain dull" there, the eighteen British poets in *New Departures 14* (even compared to the nine Americans also represented in it) are original, energetic, heterodox and audacious. Half of them are under thirty-five, and more than half more or less unknown.

What a pity the UK's central literary administration is clearly-exception to Kirkup's view, that "Councils and Ministries of Culture are biased in favour of safe, *sonsible*, politically reliable Establishment figures". The main and indicatively long-standing beneficiaries of the Directorate's encouragement to magazines (including, alas, the *Poetry Review* under its new editor, thus far) strike me as almost grotesquely predictable, comfortable, parochial and elitist. If the few surviving attempts to open up to "foreign" or otherwise unfamiliar, nonconformist, experimental and adventuresome work continue to be so wilfully nipped in the bud, the rivers of raw material "of home" are that much more likely to stagnate, or dry up altogether. Remember Blake: "Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race! Nations are Destroy'd, or Flourish, in proportion as Their Poetry, Painting and Music are Destroy'd or Flourish!"

MICHAEL HOROVITZ.
New Departures, Bisley, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

'In Memoriam'

Sir, – Michael Mason's review (May 14) of Shotto and Shaw's edition of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* ends with the questions, "What are the 'iron hills' of section 56? Finally, does this section really contain the least reference to evolution, *pace* the Victorian commentators?"

The "iron hills" are without doubt the sandstone hills of Scotland, as described in Hugh Miller's *The Old Red Sandstone*, 1841. They are coloured red by the iron oxide which they contain. In the phrase "seal'd within the iron hills" Tennyson refers to the fossil fishes discovered by Miller in these sandstones, and looks forward to the time when nothing will remain of mankind but such fossils.

Miller's work is one of the basic books of nineteenth-century geology, and it influenced professionals such as Professor Louis Agassiz and Sir Roderick I. Murchison. It does not contain, however, any advocacy of evolution – nor does Tennyson's section 56 (section 55 in my edition) refer to it, as the text could just as well refer to "special creation". Both Miller and Agassiz were believers in "special creation".

JOHN S. KEBABIAN.
308 North Bradford Street, Dover, Delaware 19901.

Richard Challoner

Sir, – In his review (May 21) of Eamon Duffy's *Challoner and His Church*, Peter Hebblethwaite implies that Challoner's *Garden of the Soul* has been out of print since the 1960s. I have pleasure in informing you that our society brought out a selection of the edition of 1740 last year and that it is available from me at 50p per copy (including postage).

J. A. HILTON,
Challoner Society, c/o 282 Whelley, Wigan, Lancashire.

We regret that in last week's issue the photograph of Anthony Caro's "Piece LXXX" was printed upside down.

Among this week's contributors

MICHAEL BANTON is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bristol. His *Racial and Ethnic Competition* will be published in 1982.

ALAN BROWNJOHN's most recent collection of poems is *A Night in the Gazebo*, 1981.

ABRAHAM BRUMBERG's *Poland: Genesis of a Revolution* will be published later this year.

HEDLEY BULL is Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford.

STEPHEN CLARK's books include *The Moral Status of Animals*, 1977.

JOHN CLOUDSLEY-THOMPSON is Professor of Zoology at Birkbeck College, London and President of the British Arachnological Society.

PETER CONRAD's most recent book is *Television: the Medium and its Manners*, which will be reviewed shortly in the *TLS*.

MARGHERITA D'AMICO is Professor of English at the University of Rome.

NICHOLAS DAVIDSON is a lecturer in History at the University of Leicester.

KATHERINE DUNCAN-JONES's *Selected Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* was reissued by Carcanet Press in 1980.

KYRIL FITZLYON's most recent book is *Before the Revolution*, 1978.

KATE FLINT is a lecturer in English at the University of Bristol.

HENRY GIFFORD's books include *Pasternak: a Critical Study*, 1977.

R. H. HILTON is Professor of History at the University of Birmingham.

KEITH JEFFREY is a lecturer in History at the Ulster Polytechnic.

MAURICE LARKIN is Richard Pares Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh.

RAYMOND LISTER's books include *William Blake*, 1968, and *Infernal Methods: a Study of William Blake's art techniques*, 1975.

MARY LUTYENS's books include a biography of Sir Edwin Lutyens, 1981.

WILFRID MELLERS's most recent book is *Bach and the Dance of God*, 1981.

CHRISTOPHER NORRIS's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* has just been published.

MARTIN POLLOCK is Emeritus Professor of Biology at the University of Edinburgh.

C. J. RAWSON's books include *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress*, 1972.

BRIAN ROTMAN is the author of *Jean Piaget: Psychologist of the Real*, 1977.

M. L. ROSENTHAL's books include *The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*, 1967.

EUGENE SCHULKINO is Reader in French History and Literature at the University of Sussex.

ERICH SEGAL teaches Classics at Yale University.

RAMAN SELDEN is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Durham. His *English Verse Satire 1590–1765* was published in 1978.

GEORGE SZIRTES's collection of poems, *Slant Door*, was published in 1980.

OLIVER TAPLIN's most recent book is *Greek Tragedy in Action*, 1979.

STANLEY WEINTRAUB's books include *The London Yankees*, 1979.

From renewal to repression

Abraham Brumberg

If shadow enhances the brilliance of light, then the Poland of August 1980–December 1981 must surely shine more brightly because of the darkness now enveloping the country. The contrast between Poland today and Poland in those sixteen months is a stark one. Harder to distinguish are the processes whereby the Poland of Solidarity was brought to a swift and brutal end. All seven books under review, treating as they do the period of "renewal" – its roots, character and (in most cases) its turbulent history up to roughly September 1981 – deal either directly or indirectly with these processes. Here, I shall concentrate on two factors which seem to me central and most open to dispute, inasmuch as they were never wholly resolved within Solidarity or by its allies, and were exacerbated by the recalcitrant and ambivalent attitude of the régime. The first has to do with the fundamental inspirations and aspirations of the "renewal" movement. The second concerns the nature and degree of power which Solidarity hoped to wield, the relationship between Solidarity and the country's rulers, and the kind of compact which could – or could not – be forged between the two.

What lay at the heart of the "renewal" movement? Not only disgruntlement over economic privation, nor even the attempt to transform Poland's political structures – though these issues were, of course, vitally important – but a profound desire to restore the physical and spiritual health of the nation. The "sick man of Europe" was to be cured, once and for all, of the accumulated ills of centuries of foreign rule, abortive insurrections, war, occupation and, finally, an alien socio-political system. The programmatic document adopted by Solidarity in October 1981 (unfortunately not reproduced in any of the books under review), in which the union proclaimed its intent not only to erect a model of "social, political and cultural pluralism", but also to create the "necessary conditions for the physical, mental and moral development" of the Polish people, provides eloquent testimony to this vision.

The basic inspirations for the genesis of Solidarity were present long before the "renewal" of 1980–81. This is amply borne out by Peter Raina's *Independent Social Movements in Poland*, a companion volume to his *Political Opposition in Poland 1954–1977*. It is not, perhaps, a work of great depth or meticulous scholarship, marred as it is by the author's interest in arid academic theories and "model building", and by his repeated failure to place the various "social movements" in a proper analytical and historical framework. In addition, it boasts some startling formulations (eg, the source of Solidarity's "historical development lies in the dynamic character of the Polish mind"), and no less startling translations (surely at his trial Mirosław Chojecki, head of the "uncensored" publishing house NOWA, did not address the presiding judge as "Your Lordship"?) For all these objections, the book contains a wealth of documents illustrating the remarkable diversity of issues which animated Polish society in the 1970s, as well as their common denominator. Most of the statements put out by the Social Self-Defence Committee KSS/KOR, for instance, concerned matters such as political persecution, police brutality and freedom of press and conscience. But other KOR documents clearly suggest that in KOR's view, the lack of political pluralism, suppression of truth and violations of legality were the outward manifestations of what it termed the "deteriorating moral condition of the nation". While the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) laid primary stress on national traditions, patriotism and aspirations for independence, its documents reveal an equally serious concern with broader social and economic problems. The Student Solidarity Committees, organized for the purpose of defending "student rights", also expressed their intention of "exercising influence" over the "conditions prevailing in the community at large". The community at large was, indeed, the concern of *everyone*.

More relevant still are the documents compiled by the so-called "Experience and the Future" group (DiP), the first two of which have now been made available in their entirety in English. This group, which comprised more than a hundred prominent intellectuals, many of them party members, was permitted to meet only once, in November 1978; both its papers are therefore based on written responses to questionnaires rather than on the minutes of live discussions. They are fascinating for their indictment of the country's social, political and economic system, and also because they reveal that even the "loyal opposition" (in George Schöpflin's apt phrase) was deeply concerned with how to arrest the process of what it saw as a malignant disease threatening the entire social fabric. Underlying all the respondents' criticism – of the party's industrial and agricultural policies, of growing social inequalities, of the *nomenklatura* system, of stifling censorship – was a fear of the effects of such abuses on the mental and moral state of the nation. The authors called attention to pervasive "cynicism", "indifference", "collective psychosis", the weakening of social bonds", "the void between the primary groups (family, friends) and the nation as a social totality", the "social pathology" resulting from "the erosion of the rule of law".

The story of DiP touches directly on the second problem examined here – that of power. The "loyal opposition's" diagnosis of the country's ills was indeed similar to that of other groups (such as KOR); so was their belief that proper solutions could be found only by fashioning a new political system both more representative of and more responsive to popular aspirations. Unlike KOR, however, they remained committed to the notion (as Professor Bielasiak observes in his Introduction to the American edition) "that change can be accomplished by addressing the political authorities and reasoning with them concerning the necessity of reforms". How viable was the hope of entering into a dialogue with an élite determined, as both DiP reports concur, to preserve its monopoly of power? And with whom should this dialogue be conducted – with the party rank and file, with the more enlightened members of the *apparat*, or with those elusive wielders of power in the Politburo and the police and security organs? The need for strong medicine was obvious – but who was to administer it, and how?

The members of DiP forwarded their first report, "On the State of the Republic", to "the highest political and state authorities", as well as "to the moral authorities of Polish society" (presumably the Church and prominent intellectuals). When the former not surprisingly chose not to respond, DiP still hesitated to go public; the document was eventually released by the independent publishing house NOWA, with a postscript by Professor Edward Lipinski, doyen of Polish economists and one of the founders of KOR (something which both the British and American editions, oddly enough, fail to point out). Undaunted in its resolve to find a collocutor, DiP's "editorial committee" compiled a second report ("Which Way Out?", which outlined specific measures to be taken "in the nearest future". As a contribution to the discussions about Poland's problems, its effect was salutary; as an effort to enlist the country's leaders in a common effort to take action, it was a resounding failure.

An even sadder fate befell the third DiP paper, called "The Polish Society after August 1980", and published in the spring of 1981 (see the Polish version in *Kultura*, Paris, September 1981). Nearly a year after the Gdansk Agreement, the prospects of resolving the country's crisis, according to the authors, were slender; "The practical reforms will be worked out in the chamber of politicians who would like nothing better than to forget about the reforms." Nevertheless, the "way out" still lay apparently in an appeal to the enlightened self-interest of the régime. The new document did not explain how politicians so reluctant to implement reforms could be persuaded to bring about a truly "representative" system, or why the party should willingly relinquish its "leading role" (as the paper urged) in favour of something called a "guiding role" – ie, that of an arbiter among contending social and political forces. DiP's continued faith in the power of reason, its moderate tone and its conviction that Poland's rulers were still capable of winning popular support and reassuming the "rich traditions of socialist thought" all doomed it in the eyes of a tired and angry society that had no more confidence in its rulers, precious little patience for complaisant gestures, and a deep suspicion of socialist rhetoric. Thus, a once respected and influential body found itself rejected as much by its putative "partner" as by its own erstwhile sympathizers.

In *The Polish August*, Neal Ascherson comments wryly on what he calls the "incomplete cross [that] has been a curse of post-war Poland", the failure of both the rulers and their adversaries to act resolutely in a manner consistent with their interests and their principles. For the opposition, Ascherson says, "the 'natural' impetus of 1956, 1970 and indeed of 1980 was to carry on until the régime had been overthrown ... [but] Poland's 'geopolitical situation' or 'raison d'état' – in short, the military power of the Soviet Union – created an invariable consensus that these rebellions must be artificially slowed up before they had run their course". This he considers part of the Polish propensity for "cognitive dissonance", for fatal misperceptions of reality. I am no more persuaded by Ascherson's generalization about the Polish national character than I am impressed by his grasp of history – eg, that the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 was an "agreement through which Stalin bought time to prepare himself against a German attack". On Solidarity, however, Ascherson is generally penetrating, judicious and sound. And he is on to something when he observes that the "gap between description and reality – the 'sham' nature of everything" in Poland – often obscured reality on certain matters, such as, by the late 1970s, "where real power lay".

DiP's persistant attempts to engage the "highest authorities" in a "dialogue" is a case in point. But isn't the same true, one wonders, about KOR, whose strategy (well depicted both by Ascherson and by Denis MacShane, the latter in an admirably lucid and informative volume) differed fundamentally from that of the "loyal opposition"? Unlike DiP, KOR – in keeping with the views of Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron, set forth in the 1970s – assumed that attempts to convince Poland's rulers, or to treat them as potential allies, were bound to fail; that there was no way of reforming the system from within; that hope lay in establishing "autonomous social movements" which would act essentially as pressure groups forcing the authorities into gradual concessions. Only citizens, organizing themselves independently to look after their own legitimate interests and acting in unison, had a chance of influencing and changing the policies of a régime inherently resistant to change.

Yet even this concept, which in effect advocated negotiating from a position of strength and which envisaged a "partnership" between society and its rulers, was vague as to the precise nature of such a partnership. The activities of KOR (and other like-minded groups, including lay Catholic organizations) before 1980, were aimed at raising the consciousness of and mobilizing society; in this, they were singularly successful. And the creation of Solidarity, with its determination not to be co-opted into the business of running the state, but to represent the interests of industrial workers (and eventually of virtually the whole of society) *vis-à-vis* the state, was a tribute to the strategy elaborated by KOR. But both in theory and practice, this strategy turned out to be based on an underestimation of the tenacity of the ruling élite; furthermore, like the DiP plan, it was not directed at specific and carefully identified centres of power.

When, in the spring of 1981, Solidarity, faced with the immobility and obduracy of the régime, finally decided to assume co-responsibility for governing the country, it clearly went beyond the bounds of its original conception of partnership. Such a dispensation was congruent, rather, with the idea of workers' self-management of factories, a cause which Solidarity now embraced. But on the level of national decision-making, that dispensation made sense only if Solidarity declared itself a political party and became part of a coalition government. This was something Solidarity, though describing itself not merely as a union but as a "broad social movement", understandably declined to do. Instead, its principal slogan became "social control" – a term which figured prominently in the Gdansk Agreement of August 1980, and which now acquired institutional form. As Bronisław Geremek, chairman of Solidarity's board of advisers (under arrest since December 13), explained in an interview given in November 1981, the proposed "social councils for the country's economy, culture, education, radio and television" were designed "not to govern", but to monitor the government's policies and ensure their proper implementation. In retrospect, it is not difficult to see why the subtle difference between "social control" and "governing" was lost on General Jaruzelski and Co.

A similar failure – or reluctance – to come to grips with some of the implications of power in Poland may be discerned in Andrzej Szczypiorski's *The Polish Ordeal*. A gifted novelist and dramatist, Szczypiorski was closely associated with KOR circles, and many of his writings which the censor had banned appeared in the unofficial literary monthly *Zapis*. *The Polish Ordeal* is an extended personal and historical essay, aimed at providing the Western reader with an understanding of Poland, especially of its most recent past. It is an engaging book, gracefully written, replete with witty and incisive observations. All of this makes some of the author's judgments the more puzzling: for instance, of Oomulka, whom he describes as "honest" and "faithful to his principles". The term "honest" (as well as "enlightened" and "wise") seems even more bizarre when conferred on Mieczyslaw Rakowski, for many years editor of the weekly *Polityka* and since February (not, as the book has it, March) 1981 Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Jaruzelski's right-hand man.

The trouble with bestowing such epithets on communist politicians is that the latter are almost invariably apt to confound them. In 1948–49, Gomulka opposed the Stalinist policy of forced collectivization; in addition, he had a distaste for blood-letting: that was enough, presumably, to make him a "liberal". In 1957–58, he turned brutally against those of his supporters who thought that an ideal communist state is one in which workers run factories and writers are free to write as they please. Similarly with Rokowski, who in the 1960s had advocated more rational economic policies and a measure of political liberalization. Himself once a "revisionist", he retained a curious respect for his former friends, and despised thugs and antisemites. After August 1980 – no doubt in all "honesty" – Rakowski welcomed the emergence of Solidarity in the hope that some pressure from below would be good for the party. But once Deputy Premier, he no longer "played tactical games with the apparatus of power" (in Szczypiorski's words): he was now part of it himself. By August 1981 Rakowski's increasingly hostile attitude toward Solidarity made him the "bête-noire of millions of people in Poland". I quote Szczypiorski because while he clearly appreciated Rakowski's new role, he seemed unwilling or unable to draw the appropriate conclusions about it. MacShane, who as a British trade-unionist very sensibly assumed from the outset that no organization aimed at defending the interests of workers can ever maintain "a clear-cut division between trade union demands and political demands", was convinced by the spring of 1981 that the issue was one of *effective* power (my emphasis). "And there [was] no evidence that the most liberal or reformist of the party leadership [was] willing to surrender it voluntarily". Which certainly holds true for Mieczyslaw Rakowski.

These remarks are not, of course, meant to denigrate Szczypiorski, or the Solidarity leaders. One cannot read any of these books without appreciating the dilemmas faced by Solidarity and its allies, the contradictions embedded in any attempt to fashion a practical strategy out of millennial aspirations, and to apply such a strategy in a struggle with an adversary whose basic aim was the preservation of monopolistic power. There were obstacles even on the level of semantics. As MacShane observes, "Solidarity's leaders, educated as they were under post-1945 dispensations . . . had difficulties in expressing exactly what they wanted in language that was completely unambiguous. Self-censorship is unavoidable. Certain subjects are taboo – the leading role of the Party, the Soviet Union, the spread of independent trade unionism to other East European countries." (These words were written before the Solidarity congress of September 1981, when the taboo on the last subject was broken in a resolution appealing to workers in Eastern Europe to emulate their Polish comrades.) But "while such self-censorship, politically understandable and necessary as it may be, persists, then Solidarity's conceptual framework will remain limited."

During the sixteen months of freedom, the population at large, as well as its spokesmen and leaders, swung continuously between hope and despair, between faith in their cause and fear lest their efforts end in catastrophe. The British journalist John Taylor, in his slender volume *Five Months with Solidarity* (a lively personal account of his experiences in Poland from September 1980 until February 1981, followed by a narrative based on secondary sources), describes the euphoria of his friends in Solidarity co-existing with their bleak awareness of the perils of their situation. And the glimpses into Walesa's charismatic personality contained in the excellent compendium, *The Book of Lech Walesa*, demonstrate that Solidarity's top leadership was given to doubt and self-criticism. In an interview Walesa himself said that "we made a very serious mistake at the very beginning. We should have gone out and educated the people . . . explained things to them, got them to reach a common level of thought. We didn't do it, and it's costing us dear now."

Yet could Solidarity have avoided some of these mistakes and, by pursuing a different course, averted its fate? It seems clear that if in fact an opportunity had existed, it was gone by the summer or early autumn of 1981; by that time the party *apparat* was merely stalling, continually provoking Solidarity into escalating its demands, and in effect waiting for the proper moment to deliver the final blow. But could the process of disintegration have been halted in the early months of 1981? All the authors referred to here agree that one of the most significant developments was the powerful movement within the party (a million of whose members had joined Solidarity) which aimed at introducing internal democratic reforms and forcing the leadership to reach a genuine accord with Solidarity. All agree, too, that the party's Ninth Congress, held in July 1981, proved a great disappointment: while it adopted unprecedented democratic by-laws and elected (by secret ballot) a Central Committee composed largely of new faces, while some of the most odious hard-liners were shown the door, the party emerged more unified and more determined than ever to deal resolutely with its "partner".

According to Szczypiorski, the reason for this was that with all the internal changes, the party was still unable to offer society what it craved above all else, namely, "to rule itself". This was no doubt true. In Ascherson's view, the violent letter sent by the Soviet party on June 5, criticizing both Kania and Jaruzelski and coming on the heels of massive military manoeuvres in and around Poland, "instantly sobered the behaviour" of the party. That the letter did indeed have this effect is undeniable, though it is arguable whether the Soviet Union was ever really serious about an invasion the political, military and economic costs of which would have been incalculable. (There is no evidence at all for Ascherson's speculation, contained in the postscript to the American edition, that the Jaruzelski coup may have been motivated by the general's assumption "that it was the only way to make Soviet intervention unnecessary".) Certainly the letter was used by those opposed to any concessions (and by then nothing short of the most sweeping concessions would do) to discipline the party, silence its most vociferous "reformers" – thousands of whom left in disgust – and then turn with full force against Solidarity. The hardliners, organized in various "forums" and even boasting their own newspaper, *Rzeczywistość* (Reality), were delighted. From Moscow came approval and – eventually – all the help needed to execute the military coup. As in the past, Soviet strategy was to support the "loyal" forces within the *apparat*, not itself to launch an infinitely risky operation. Moscow succeeded, but only because its allies were numerous enough and – more important – strong, determined, and well equipped.

Which brings me back to the question of real power. What if Solidarity, instead of assuming that Polish soldiers would never fire upon fellow-Poles, and that a splendidly patriotic general would never order them to do so, had aimed at capturing the armed forces – the instrument, as it turned out, of its eventual destruction? In an article smuggled out of detention camp and published recently in *Der Spiegel*, Michnik notes that the party reformers "could attack the bureaucratic structure effectively only if they organized a collective movement, but not as a faction struggling for power". But could a collective movement be fashioned without Solidarity's support? And could then the armed forces – or key elements of the officer corps – have been enlisted in the nation's cause? (It had happened once before – in October 1956, when Gomulka, with a unified party and society behind him, and ready to pit Polish forces against Soviet, forced Khrushchev to call off an incipient invasion.)

To pose these questions is not, alas, to answer them. In the months preceding the party congress Solidarity was preoccupied with its own confrontations with the régime. And if it didn't forge an alliance with rank-and-file party reformers, it was because it had learned to expect little from a party so thoroughly bankrupt and with so squalid a record of opportunism and toadyism. Perhaps it should have opted not for power-sharing, but for incremental changes; perhaps its interest might have been better served had it heeded the advice of its moderates who hoped, in MacShane's words, "to make the struggle gradual, to make it a process of debate and compromise and external arbitration". But this, as I have tried to show, was profoundly difficult as much because of the régime's tactics as of the momentum of the labour movement itself. In addition, Solidarity was being eroded by increasing conflicts – between radicals and moderates, between those rooted in social democratic traditions and those inspired by nationalism. The movement even had its own antisemites, most of them in an amorphous group calling itself "genuine Poles" (this goes unmentioned in all the books under review). The interminable discussions about goals and programmes and the personal feuds, too, could only delight the *apparatchiki*, who only a year earlier had seemed to be in a state of shock verging on paralysis. Yet was this avoidable in a movement possessed, from the very beginning, of an almost chiliastic passion? Was it feasible to curb natural instincts and political processes, such as ideological diversity, or to be patient and moderate in dealing with an adversary stealthily plotting your demise?

The questions continue, until the armchair observer, however partisan and sympathetic, must stop, defeated by the impossibility of imposing considerations of logic and rationality on a revolution which by definition defied rationality and broke all precedents. Ultimately, he can only admire those in Poland who were as well, if not more, aware of the excruciating dilemmas confronting them, yet resolved to go on.

Tunnel vision

Daniel Johnson

TIMOTHY GARTON ASH
Und wisst du nicht mein Bruder sein? Die DDR heute
288pp. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag/Rowohlt. DM14.

Western observers of East Germany are starved, not only of information – it was a source of surprise for this reader, if of satisfaction for Party Secretary Honecker, to learn that the number of political prisoners there is quite unknown (though it is not fewer than 3,000) – but also of good analysts with first-hand experience of this unfashionable country, which is the lynchpin of the Warsaw Pact. Timothy Garton Ash, who has written excellently for the *Spectator* and *The Times* on Eastern Europe, and on both Germanies, offers here a glimpse of what a combination of bad conscience and neo-Stalinism may do to a culture trapped in the vice of a strategic and industrial significance which banishes even the hope Polish-type experimentation.

In an East German joke, Lenin, Stalin and Honecker are on a train which is forced to halt because the track comes to an end. Lenin proposes tearing up the line behind and replacing it in front; Stalin proposes shooting the driver; Honecker draws the blinds in his carriage, smiles, and announces: "Off we go!" Tuonel visions, Mr Garton Ash argues, has not only blotted out present and future dangers, but the ghosts of the past too. Though he does not consider that a continuity of personnel between the Third Reich and the GDR has been a major problem, his *Soviet Psychoprisons* by Harvey Fireside is shortly to be reissued as a paperback (20pp. Norton. £3.30. 0 393 00065 6). It opens with a brief foreword by Zhores Medvedev, followed by chapters on "The Patients", "The Doctors", "The Resisters" (Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Pyotr Grigorenko and Leonid Plyushch. The Manual on Psychiatry for Dissidents, compiled by Semyon Gluzman and Vladimir Bukovsky appears as an appendix, together with other related documents.

discussion of paramilitary youth organizations and of militarism in general suggests another, perhaps more sinister form of persistance. It is well known that the GDR's human exports include, besides disgruntled intellectuals like Bahro or Biermann (delighted to discover that, far from being "useless men", they are already honorary members of the West German left-wing establishment), plenty of ordinary criminals. Less well known is the fact that such criminals often become neo-Nazis in gaol – and remain so after they are dumped over the Wall. And not only is the burden of Nazi guilt sloughed off, but the old dislike of neighbouring peoples with longer memories, like the Czechs and Poles, has justified the East Germans in helping to suppress opposition there to far milder dictatorships than their own.

While quietly satisfying the reader with statistical information and digestible analysis, Garton Ash also conjures up places and their inhabitants with remarkable deftness. A literary nation with pitiably few distractions is likely to talk well, and here it is allowed to talk. Garton Ash does not divide up his witnesses according to politics or class; there is no suggestion of a people divisible into non-communists who are good and communists who are better actors. One division which he certainly recognizes, however, is that between generations. Young people, realistic enough to accept the political consequences of their geography and of their elders' follies, yet entitled to demand some sort of coherence from East German intellectuals; instead get nothing but snubs and moral blackmail. "We suffered, we extirpated Nazism, we rebuilt the country, we placated the Russians, we gave you what we never had," they are told by those who perhaps spent a comfortable youth in the bourgeois Weimar Republic as cabaret communists. Garton Ash, perhaps, does not do justice to the frightening potential for organized violence among East German youth, though he does provoke fatuous figures like Stephen Hermlin to damn themselves with their own self-righteousness. In the Alexanderplatz at the centre of East Berlin Garton Ash was chased by another car. He stopped, and the other driver pointed to the seat belt: "With us, duty!" The seat belt, for Garton Ash, is the East German national symbol.

Kitchen humour

Kyril FitzLyon

Z. DOLGOPOLOVA (Editor)
Russia Dies Laughing: Jokes from Soviet Russia
125pp. Deutsch. £4.95.
0 233 97402 4

There are several ways of dealing with a book of jokes. One can, for instance, read it from beginning to end at a single sitting or perhaps at two, swallowing the contents in large gulps, like a pint of beer. This is often the reviewer's way, particularly if he is in a hurry. It is the wrong way. It leads to depression and irritability. Then there is the consumer's way – the businessman's, the politician's, the music-hall artist's: strictly utilitarian. The reader is on the lookout for a new funny story, less for the sake of enjoyment than in order to enliven a speech, crush an opponent, suggest a gag, etc. For him a collection of jokes is a handbook to be consulted from time to time in search of material. He will carefully select two or three jokes suitable for the occasion he has in mind and work them in, ignoring the rest till some other occasion. This is vastly superior to the first, and may, in fact, be the right way.

How useful would such a reader find Ms Dolgopolova's little collection? Not very, I would say – mainly because too many of the jokes are too venerable, their peregrination from country to country, from person to person, has tired them out. "A man ran through the streets of Moscow shouting 'Khrushchev is a swine!' He was seized and given twenty-one years: one year for defamation, and twenty years for leaking state secrets." I've heard this one about Rakosi, and about Hitler before him, and about Mussolini before *him*. "The book", says the editor, "was conceived around the kitchen table of a tiny Russian kitchen . . ." This may well have been so, but its paternity, or, at least that of most of its jokes, turns out to be International. Too many of the jokes have a racialist tang about them: Russians are dull-witted, Jews smart, Arabs cowardly or stupid. Obviously an embarrassing, even a risky choice for a public speaker.

However, there is a third way of coping with a joke book – the connoisseur's, the dilettante's (in the original, eighteenth-century sense of the word). This consists in waiting until the mood is upon one and then dipping into the book for the sheer enjoyment of it. This is the direct opposite of the first method and is, of course, the best. It is also the cheapest: the book can be dipped into in a bookshop without bothering to buy it. In this, then, the one to be recommended in the present case? Alas, the answer must once again be No. The dipper is likely to be disappointed: too many of the jokes rely for effect on their coarseness. This might have been funny some years ago when it (including four-letter words and such-like) was rare and unexpected and, therefore, produced a shock. But it has ceased to be unusual and, therefore, no longer shocks.

A number of the jokes left me completely nonplussed and blaming myself for my clearly inadequate sense of humour. Others depend on local conditions and have to be explained by the editor. Thus: "A yoga student wants to rent a nail in a corridor – *Small ad in Moscow newspaper.*" End of joke, except for an asterisk, referring the reader to the editorial note at the bottom of the page: "The student housing problem in Moscow is so bad that if a student fails to get into a hostel, he is happy to be able to rent a corner of someone's room."

Fortunately, there is a fourth way to deal with this particular book. It consists in looking at the illustrations rather than at the text. They are by JAK, which is surely a sufficient recommendation.

Forms of fecklessness

Patricia Craig

DERMOT HEALY

Banished Misfortune

119pp. Allison and Busby. £6.95.

0 85031 456 9

There is a style of writing that depends for its effects on randomness, disorder and slight distortion: it makes everything vaguer and crazier than is sitogether natural. It never presents a central idea straightforwardly, but goes in for circuitous approaches to it, or uncontrollable swerving away from it. It puts compulsive sensitivity in the place of clarity and insight, one of its objectives being to render all its images in a heightened way. It's the style adopted by Dermot Healy for his first collection of stories, in which intense, wayward and romantic feeling predominates over simple craftsmanship. If the romanticism is inverted, to accommodate bleakness and disaffection, it is none the less showy; like the American writer Jayne Ann Phillips, Healy is drawn to the picturesquely tainted. A compensatory sense of derangement informs his stories too.

The lives he evokes are shady and off-key. The Co Fermanagh nymphomaniac of "A Family and a Future", all but retsrded – "tanned from wandering the fields after lost cattle she would wander the market on fair day, watched by the treacherous eyes of the stall-holders, in ribbons and patched skirt, huge hips nkimbo" – is among the least hopeless of an exceptionally dismaying lot. Healy's London is a place of windy subways, vagrants, sleepless nights. The city attracts the wilfully feckless, like the disenchanted hero of "Kelly" who keeps a diary to record his conclusions about life, and his unstable Polish acquaintance who sleeps with his eyes open. Fecklessness in the countryside – the Irish countryside – takes a more humble and instinctual form. Here, discoloured canals, bogholes, stray tinker dwellings make a fitting backdrop to the spasms of violence, episodes of betrayal, alienation, sexual failure and other miseries the stories depict.

Healy's prose, with its faux naif structure and impassioned understatement, teeters constantly on the brink of self-parody: "As if he knew the laundered space of each guilty psyche . . ." ("A Family and a Future"); "Jim burns with the necessity to get things done, a busy self, he perches on the shoulders of his friend looking at the competing world" ("The Island and the Calves"). Perhaps it's impatience to get the strong impression down on paper that makes him so regardless of coherence and sense. He is less credible, than Desmond Hogan (with whom he has been unfavourably about the actual meanings of words, but no less avid for expressive eccentricities. The sentence containing many clauses is one of Healy's most persistent foibles:

> . . . she flicked out her own short hair, the holiday at last for real, trying to create some dancing curls, and patted down her fresh autumn dress and knocked the mud of the fields from her shoes, spread out her toes to release the sweet stiffness of the journey from her body, the stifling impression of having gone nowhere till she smelt the roots of the sea, the girl in her gliding down as Ennis slowed the pipes.

This is from "Banished Misfortune", in which the past is reassembled in bits and pieces – a high window there, a red limestone rock there – rather in the way the newly homeless might root for their possessions after the blitz.

When he writes plainly, Healy can startle us with the vigour and perceptiveness of his observations. "They had burrowed down so deep in anxiety that happiness was nearly hysterical", he says of the Northern Irish family in the title story who take a trip to Galway to ease the pressure caused by living insecurely. He is so good et unembellished description – "He looked out of the window at the small miserable town, the fighting jackdaws on the sagging slates with their burden of moss, the flat roof above Woolworth's with pools of water on its dark green felt" – that we wonder why he doesn't produce it more often. The method he chooses to examine various kinds of deprivation – sexual, social and so forth – is impressive when it comes off ("The Curse", "Love", the title story to an extent), if you discount the more obtrusive mannerisms, and irritstingly pretentious and oblique when it doesn't ("The Island and the Calves"). Incidentally, whoever chose a Gerard Dillon painting for the cover has hit on sn almost perfect visual complement to the stories: poverty-stricken, highly-coloured, idiosyncratic, askew.

Sudden deaths

Keith Jeffery

MICHAEL HATFIELD

Spy Fever

186pp. Quartet. £6.50.

0 7043 2309 5

MEG ELIZABETH ATKINS

Pallmpset

224pp. Quartet. £6.50.

0 7043 2310 9

RUTH DUDLEY EDWARDS:

Corridors of Death

186pp. Quartet. £6.50.

The second set of books to be issued under the new Quartet Crime imprint each cover distinct areas of the *genre*: espionage, ghosts and political intrigue. A common feature is sudden and violent death. Michael Hatfield's novel is the most straightforward of the three. Allan Ballsntyne, an apparently accident-prone spy exiled to the department's Central Registry after a bungled operation behind the Iron Curtain, seaks to re-establish his reputation by catching up with his old opponent Zankov. Zsnkov, in effect a biological time-bomb, is carrying a frightful and incurable virus on a suicide mission to wreak havoc on western civilization, or at least the Conservative Party annual conference.

There is a somewhat unconvincing "cold war" flavour to Hatfield's characters. Ballantyne sees himself as "one of the sentinels paid to protect a liberal democratic system ever vulnerable to attack by an alien political creed". His remorseless superior declares that the "only way to beat the Communists and their clenched fist" is to "hit them with another".

While the characterization is occasionally thin, the action is well-paced and exciting – from Sofia, where our hero evades the "vengeful and drended" Bulgarian secret police to the ornate halls of the Grand Hotel, Brighton. All the expected elements of sn espionage thriller are here: bureaucratic spymasters worrying about political implications, a 4½-litre Lagonda Rapide, traitors on both sides, including a senior KGB agent, narrow escapes of various sorts, n desperate roof-top struggle, and, of course, a beautiful woman who not surprisingly distracts Ballantyne from his chosen profession. The author mixes these ingredients well into a satisfyingly good story.

Pollimpsest is for more refined tastes. Nell Singleton, a spinster antique dealer with suppressed psychic powers, finds that sn old friend has mysteriously disappeared from her cottage in deepest rural England. In this "entranced landscape" – described in suitably lush, not to say cloying, prose – she finds s community of mostly malevolent feral neighbours. The book is curiously reminiscent of *Cold Comfort Farm*, with ample moral decay, although not the bucolic squslor (nor the humour), and "something nasty" just about everywhere. Fortunately there is a dashing bachelor Chief Inspector to help Mins Singleton through this busy world of haunted wells, strangely rushing winds and moonlit Druidic gsmen.

The nastiness in *Corridors of Death* is less mystical. Ruth Dudley Edwards has written a witty and elegant tale of wrongdoing in Whitehall, where our rulers atnb each other in the back, both literally and metaphorically. A Permanent Under Secretary is murdered in s lavatory on the twenty-seventh floor of a government building – this is indeed crime in high plscea – lesving s profusion of distinguished suspects: politicisns, buresucrats, captains of industry and senior trade unionists. The centrsl character in the dead mnn's private seeretary, Robert Amlss, who from time to time talks, as do many civil servants, as if he wee partleipating in a seminar on modern British administration. There is some excuse for this since the suthor provides us with a suitably uninformed policeman to whom the inner workings of government have to be explained. But Detective Superintendent Milton is a quick learner and soon comes to grips with the arcane practices of civil service life.

The nuthor ia herself a former civil servant and it may be that a residual antipathy to loose ends led her to conclude the novel with an all-embracing post mortem which neatly answers every question. It is a mildly disappointing, conventional ending to what is otherwise n splendid murder story. Apnrt from demonstrating the inherent marit of administrative civil servants' assassinating each other, the book goes some way towards answering the Detective Superintendent's, and everyone else's, question: "What goes on in bloody Whitehall?"

How to zotz the hitter

Alan Bold

RICHARD CONDON

Prizzi's Henaur

293pp. Michael Joseph. £7.95.

0 7181 2120 1

To suspend disbelief long enough to accept the events described in Richard Condon's latest novel it is necessary to believe, first, that an abstract concept like honour can dehumanize the individuals who subscribe to it; and, second, that language can be reduced to a euphemistic rubble which these men of honour can deploy in place of conversation. Honour, in Condon's book, is a Sicilian defence of the family. For Charley Partanna, enforcer of the New York-based Prizzi family, this is an ethical obligation: "the family were what he had been since Sicily started breeding people. They were his blood. They had been with him forever. There were hundreds of thousands of them; most of them ghosts, some of them bodies."

Charley Partanna's first loyalty, then, is to Prizzi's honour. To protect it – and the millions of dollars invested in it – he is willing to break legs and influence people or massacre them and dispose of their bodies. Charley and his Mafia colleagues do not speak like other American citizens. They have their own colourful jargon and it enables them to operate on an Us versus Them basis. They think like a persecuted minority and members of the family know that "the environment" means the Prizzi organization, that to "zotz" means to eliminate, that a "hitter" is a hired killer and that "a little problem" involves a lot of bloodshed. Charley doesn't talk a lot but when he does he uses the jargon. When he thinks, which is often, he has his own way with words.

Charley's central role in the novel is to fall in love: "He felt like somebody had handed him an armful of dead fish. Jesus, he thought, this has to be the original merry widow. I zip her husband while she's out trawling down specials in the supermarket, and she wants to marry me. What kind of a nothing woman is she?" She is Irene Walkar and Charley sees her at the wedding of the granddaughter of the Godfather, Corrado Prizzi. Although Charley has countless killings behind him he is still a sucker for a pretty face and falls in love at the first sight of Irene. Condon makes this clear in the tough-tender narrative style he uses throughout the book: "To Charley she had something like the look which had come over Pizarro when he had first spotted the Peruvian gold . . . . Jasus, Charley thought, I never saw anything like this womnn."

By the time Condon springs his first surprise the reader has been set up for a series of violent incidents. Charley is in some difficulty since he can cope with homicide but finds romance a little strange. He discovers as the pivotal part of the plot, that Irene is just like him – a hitter, a person who zotzes other people, n hired gun (or knife or whatever). The difference is that he is a big man with a massive family behind him when as she is the lone woman operating on her own as a "classy woman contract hitter".

Condon's hyperbolic prose turns every event into an issue so that the novel is strung out tight on its own tension. Charley's understanding of the nature of Irene's work is traumatic, so Condon piles on the metaphorical effects: "The furniture of Charley's mind suddenly began to come loose, the pieces crashing into each other like unfastened objects aboard a ship at sea ploughing through a hurricane." If that sounds a trifle clumsy then it has to be said, in Condon's praise, that he consistantly gives an impression of Charley as n blunt intrument or as an obstacle in a subhuman race. The reader is persuaded that if such men actually exist then Charley is an accurate representative of the species.

It is something of a challenge to a novelist to create a love interest in a story that pairs two ruthless murderers. Irene is presented as a colder fish than Charley – she has risen to the top of her profession on account of her ability to murder without remorse. She is as sound a psychopath as Charley. Condon suggests, however, that such creatures are capable of a great passion and Charley, for one, is sure that his love is the real thing.

As the novel gets into its stride with Charley and Irene established as the perfect couple of killers, life looks odd to those inside "the environment". At a crucial moment Prizzi's sacred honour is at risk and Charley has to decide between Prizzi's honour and Irene. The choice is Charley's and the outcome of the novel depends on it. Condon's expertise ensures that suspense is sustained until the last page of the book which is an impressive example of a brutal genre snd contains more shocks than most of its kind.

The insights of the poet

Henry Gifford

BORIS PASTERNAK

Zhenia's Childhood

115pp. Allison and Bushy. £6.95 (paperback £1.95).

0 85031 466 6

These four stories from early in Pasternak's career are more or less contemporary with the two books of poetry which won him instant fame, *My Sister Life* and *Themes and Variations*. As a set they first appeared together in 1925. (The blurb wrongly gives this date as 1929.) Alice Brown's translation – the one used here, though his name has beao omitted – was first published in 1959 by Elek Books.

From the start Pasternak was as much interested in writing prose as poetry. He intended *Zhenio's Childhood* to be the opening of a large-scale novel, broken off at this point, which may be seen as a first move towards *Doctor Zhivago*. One critic, Michel Aucouturier, has described it as "a sketch for that novel of feminine destiny later incarnated in the person of Lara Antipova", and he detects a precursor of her husband Pasha in Polivanov of *Aerial Routes* (the last story here), another sensitive man endowed by the revolution with a hard impersonality.

The remaining stories, *Il Tratto di Apelle* and *Letters from Tulo*, are slighter than these two, and more self-conscious in their modernism. But they deal, as Aucouturier noted, with a theme of great significance for Pasternak, that of the poet's affinity to the actor. For both a "supreme spontaneity" can arise from technique and artifice, and Hamlet in Zhivago's poem of that name takes on a role requiring submission to the drama of destiny.

A reviewer of the volume that came out in 1925, Konstantin Loks, who well understood Pasternak's purposes, wrote of the particular attention that prose demands when embodying the insights of the poet (an attention which Henry James also took for granted). In such prose each recorded element has a "close implication," an "extreme intimacy" with every other. *Zhenio's Childhood* was for him "the confession of an artist who has immersed himself in the profoundly primitive, almost preverbal life of sensation, of the first testin experience". Her story is concerned with unoing the right names for things. It was mistakenly supposed by many who read these tales that they had no subject. Even Zamyatin came to this conclusion: he admired Pasternak's innovatory prose mainly for its syntax. It does indeed articulate the most subtle of impressions with the keenest accuracy. Pasternak declared at this time that prose and verse were inseparable poles. Between his experiments in both there was a continual interplay.

It is not easy to convey the nuances and to handle the complexity of such prose in translation. Alice Brown produced a lively and readable version, which shows considerable resource, and so far as is practicable conforms to the movement of the original. But there are a number of slips (as well as some uncouth spellings like Oulissha and Trenkov). Thus Zhenia's experience of crossing into Asia is slightly distorted. "Dull, dusty old Europe" kept postponing the moment of wonder (which turns into anti-climax) and "clumsily" but "sluggishly". She was not "put out" but "taken aback" by her brother's "wild shriek" of recognition as the boundary post flashes past. What was borne away from the train becomes "a fabulous legend" rather than "a fabulous name" (for names are important in this story). Again, when her mother's premature delivery throws the household into confusion, the maid comforts Zhenia with a whisper that should be "heard, randing," and not "exhausted". There are similar lapses that could be pointed to. The last twenty years have shown a marked improvement in the accuracy of translations from Russian. It is a pity that this was allowed to stand without any revision.

Au Dieu Inconnu, by Petru Dumitriu, which was reviewed in the *TLS* on January 15 will shortly appear in an English translation by James Kirkup. *To the Unknown God* (Collins, £6.95. 00 01 216 358 6) will be published on July 26.

A case of curing

Peter Kemp

MARGARET ATWOOD

Bodily Harm

301pp. Cape. £7.50

0 224 02016 1

The tone of Margsret Atwood's books varies considersbly: the subject-matter remains constsnt – trial by ordeal. Her heroine in *Surfacing* was surreally goaded through derangement into self-discovery. *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle* mixed farce and fesrsomeness in their accounts of women experiencing angst. *Life Before Man* brought sardonic elegance to its portrsyal of a fight through breakdown to recovery. Now, ie *Bodily Harm*, trauma is explored with glitteringly grim precision.

Whoe the novel opens, Rennie, a Canadisn journalist specializing in "lifestyles" – she has a professional eye for voguish externals, chic ephemera – is in a state of post-operative shock. A partial mastectomy, though seemingly successful, has left her feeling, like tho protagonist of *Surfacing*, "detsched, terminal". Fear of death ia stopping her from living.

Like many of Margaret Atwood's central cbaracters, Rennie is a two-ply person. Her exterior is confidently stylish. Under this veneer, though, "ingrained in her" by a repressive upbringing, ile concealed anxlaties and insecurities. Breaking down her façade, the operation splits these open. And at the same time, Rennie comes to feel, it makes her a misfit in the glossily hedonistic circles that she now inhsbits. There's no room for the smarting in the world of the smart.

Most of Rennie's associates are cosmoosed of surfaces. Jake, her lover, designs packsging: after redoing her flat, he has gone on to tsrt up their relationship into a mstter of tessy outfits, sexy games, not entirely self-mocking rituals. Jocasta, her closest female friend, is slso devoted to top dressing: she runs a fashionable second-hand store called "Ripped Off" that "apecilized in violently ugly clothes from the fifties". Modishly outré in exhumed rig-outs, she is all blasé, bizarre exterior.

Glacially satiric scenes show Rennie's raw wretchedness causing consternation in thia chromium-plated ambience. Faced with the genuinely abnormal, the artificially freskish are at s losa. This in itself could constitute a neatly mordant novel – the suave and emancipated shocked into embsrrassment by the lsst tsboo. But it proves to be just the initisl stage of Rennie's redemptiva purgatory. Unable to cope with her newly hsmpered life, she leaves for the Caribbean on what she assumes will be tsntsmount to a therspeutic holiday: an assignment to produce a slick travel piece. Congrstulating herself on her good fortunc in being able to engineer such "small absences from real life", Rennie heads for one of the less-developed islands.

Whst follows is s process that drives her out of terrified self-pity into horrified compssssion. Disorientation rapidly sets in – st first fairly comically. Msrgaret Atwood always excels at making even the ordinary aeem weird: sisple ingredients of life lika food are often, in har fiction, looked at with vivid obliquity that turns them into something queasily allen. In *Bodily Harm*, the Caribbean setting heightens the pervasive, eerie sense of life's foreignness: "There are a lot of things here that Rennie has no name for." Even the vegetation seems monstrously mutated: "obese plants with rubbery ear-shaped leaves and fruit like warts, like glnnds". The natives are opaquely hostile. Rennie's ignorance of local habits causes grotesque gaffes. But, for s deceptive while, everything is safely contained within the resim of astringent social comedy. It is only with the holding of the island's first elections that the toy scsres which have briefly startled Rennie yield to real danger.

Violent corruption, bresking through the surface, shows itself to be appsllingly extensiva. With a kind of inexorable arbitrariness that is particularly disturbing, Rennic is subjected to an experience even more harrowing than the surgery thst esrlier traumatized her. And, with grisly irony, the vocabulary central to this second ordeal is technically sppropriste to the first. "Malignancy" takes on new significance. Rennie, who has hsd nightmares about abnormal cells proliferstlng inside her, ends up through proliferstng sbnormality, inside a cell. "Massive involvement", the phrase feared by csncer patients snd once used with brittle jckiness by Rennie of emotional metters, spreads its implications into other areas. Suspected of serious politicsl involvement, she is abruptly cut off from whst she has litherto regsrded as ordinary existence. The messy abominstions thst ensue drastically alter her assessment of what constitutes real life. When the book concludes, Rennie is mssively involved in a hesithy way: as s very different kind of journalist, she is set to fight for the damsged snd exploited. A sense of life's short, precsnous span no longer paralyses her into self-centred apathy: il galvanizes her into urgent participation. She is, we are finally assured, "paying attention".

Margaret Atwood has paid attention, too, steadily contemplating the unnerving. What makes her book so considerable an achievement is the mature, informed accuracy of its view of life. What makea it so exhilarating is the profusion of tough wit and precise poetry that everywhere transforms its black bulletins from documentary into art.

Seen to be being seen

Rosemary Jackson

SUE ROE

Estella: Her Expectations

154pp. Brighton: Harvester. £6.95.

0 7108 0463 2

The main pre-text for this novel is, as the title suggests, another text – Dickens's *Great Expectations* – and its thesis could be Foucault's, that any discourse repeats another discourse in a different mode. Dickens's novel has been de-gutted and remade according to theoretical and feminist principles, to retain only a skeletal outline of its original structure, with its namesakes inhabiting a contemporary French-flavoured metropolis. Estella, a dilettante painter and writer, lodges with a dancer, an aging Isadora Duncan version of Miss Havisham, with Merey, sn allegorized image of motherhood in the basement. Pip has been marginalized into a peripheral child presence and other males are deliberate (presumably) one-dimensional literary stereotypes – for *Estella* evokes a non-masculine, almost pre-Oedipal, existence, portraying women's consciousness and construction of themselves as "women".

At its centre are the problems of female identity, the difficulty of cocasting with the ideal image in the mirror. Woman is defined as she is seen, through the look, yet this identification is illusory, insubstantial and unsatisfactory. "What I see there (in the mirror) *doesn't exist* . . . It's a figment of your imagination; you're fooled by coherence; duped by symbols," to place of a pretended wholeness, *Estella* represents bodily fragments: feet, legs, hands, painted fingernails, blushed cheekbones, prized through modern advertising. Repeated attention to bodies, fashion, dress, the textures of clothes and colours, emphasizes the problem of the image, the look, which has produced such unreal and negative portraits of women in art, and so speaks something long unspoken. "Estella cries the frustration of an abstraction she cannot identify. Wanting, above all, to feel connected to something which escapes her." As a critical intervention in a predominaotly male system of representation, *Estella* is an unsettling, experimantsl work.

Part of its interrogation of dominant forma lies in its attempt to dissolve the boundaries of the novel. Parallal to her attempt to create images of the "pre-image", Sue Roe tries to find words for the pre-verbal, close to the sensations of sight. Visual art is upheld as the ideal to which the novel should approximate – "I'd want to write a still life", says Estella – and lo many ways this novel is an Impressionist painting become literature (hence the very minimal narrative). Splashes of vivid colour stand out brilliantly against a shadowy grey background, as language itself is rendered a more painterly medium, both fluid and opaque. Words lose their rigidity, to move closer to the visual and bodily arts of painting and dance – as Estella reflects:

> Painting and dancing are best . . . In painting or dancing you start with an idea and you use paint or the body to express it. But in writing, you start with an idea that's in language, and you have to use language to express it. So you can't get the feel of the edge between what you want to say and the tools you have to say it with . . . You can't get *between* writing and what you're writing.

This is the aim of Roe's work: to create, or feel out, this "edge". To this end, *Estella* is reflexive and self-conscious, referring both to itself and to other cultural constructs: it evokes by name Diaghilev, Stravinsky, Satie, Fauré, Gershwin; paintings by Renoir, Picasso, the Impressionists, the faces of Sarah Bernhardt, Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe; the advertising clichés of *Playboy*, *Vogue*, Yves St Laurent, Lotus Elans, Alfa Romeos, and the rich surfaces of consumerism. At times it reads like a fictionalized feminist version of Barthes's *Mythologies*.

All this experimentalism and theoretical sophistication notwithstanding, there is something decadent about the enterprise. As Gustave Moreau wrote: "there is a moment when an art begins to take on the characteristics of other arts", which can be identified as "decadence"; *Estella*, positioned between fiction, fine art and theory, confirms this idea. Not only is decay its subject and symbol – "borrowing" from Dickens metaphors of the rotting wedding dress and cake, of Gothic enclosure, inertia, cobwebs – but its main concern is with the reflection, the sign, the image, as self-referring objects, reinforcing the idea of art's divorce from life and its entrapment within its own signifying process. It is as if, with the very attempt to give materiality to a "space" an "edge", all sight of the material world itself has been lost – an absorption with the problems of visibility and of constructing image has lost touch here with a wider vision, which, for all its blind spots and repressions, is present in Dickens's writing. This brings Sue Roe closer to Colette and Jean Rhys than to Virginia Woolf or Doris Lessing. Perhaps, though, the last sentence of *Estella* points to a new beginning, as the circle of woman-being-seen is broken open: "Estella begins her journey; settles herself to watch."

The American Book Awards have recently announced a list of titles which have been nominated for the American book industry's awards for 1982. The fiction section, which is divided into hardback, paperback and first novel categories includes *The Hotel New Hampshire* by John Irving; *Rabbit is Rich* by John Updike, *Dad* by William Wharton, *The Second Coming* by Walker Percy, *Lion Lake* by E. L. Doctorow, *Saving Grace* by Colin Gitlelson and *Easy Travel to Other Planets* by Ted Mooney.

Bardolatries

Linda Taylor

MEREDITH DANEMAN

The Groundling

186pp. Michael Joseph. £7.95.

0 7181 2132 5

"Judy had never seen sex before" – until, that is, she saw Claude Williams and Stella Mann play the leading roles in *Macbeth*. Judy had never heard sex before, until she heard Claude snd Stella's bed thumping against the wall between the bathroom in her Sydney home and the bedroom in the flat that Claude had rented from her mother. English actors performing Shakespeare in Australia, Claude and Stella provide the key, for thirteen-year-old Judy, to the mysteries of sn adult, sophisticated world. Shc spends s lot of time with her ear to the wall and becomes besotted by the parts that Claude and Stella play, both on and off stage.

The Groundling, Meredith Daneman's second novel, is, as the title suggests, rooted in Shakespeare. Judy, ss groundling, lives and breathea the texts of the plays shc knows: *Mncbeth*, *The Twming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*; she thinks in Shakeapesrian cliches. Through her burgeoning friendship with Claude and Stella, Judy begins to recognize the overlsp in life of tragedy and comedy. Fresh from a spell as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, her idola play Petruchio and Katherina with equal panache. An actress herself, Meredith Daneman knows that "the purpose of playing . . . is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." She knows that fiction imitates life and that life, very often, imitates fiction. Twelve years later, in England, Judy, a latter-day Viola (with nll that that implies) stage-manages the final meeting, or "performance" of Stella and Claude. It's the climax of her desire, in Sydney, to to "perform for them some complicated Slamese service of unification". Aged twenty-five, however, she is an intruder, "the price of her friends' reconciliation was her own exile from them"; shc runa away.

Exile and drowning, changes of location, time jumps, innocence and experience, incest (in England, Judy sleeps with Clsude) – themes of eroticism, possessiveness and jealousy, followed by retribution and reconciliation, are all hinted at the novel. Of course; Danemsn has done the bulk of her implicit borrowing not from Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies but from the late plays. Watery scenea, in particulsr, abound: Judy in the bath while Claude and Stella make love, the three of them getting ecstatically drenched by rsin in Claude's sports car, their bathing in the sea, Judy's two-day crying bout whan her mother refuses her permission to follow her friends to Melbourna. What took Shkspeeare twenty-five years and thirty-seven plays to accomplish has taken Meredith Danenian a mere 186 psges of indifferent prose.

The reduetion of Shnkespeare, though, is part of the point. It mskes us laugh when Judy's thoughts, in extremis, turn out well-known lines:

> "For God's sake don't tell ler I sent you", aald Claude, but Judy knew well enough the purpose of her mission: Of then unfold the passion of my love.

But the joke wears thin after e while: Daneman's rib-nudging tonc becomes trenome. She is best on the ambiguous position of the pubescent girl. Half child, half adult, Judy falls in love with Stella and Claude, while they, half adult and half child in thoir passion for one another, adopt her like a fawning puppy. The adult Judy is not convincing. The overtones and undertones of Shakespeare's comic, tragic and pastoral romantic plots are too feebly wide-ranging.

Like the psychoanalytic game where the subject is presented with a word that suggests a word and another word that suggests another word, Meredith Daneman has strung together a rag-bag of associations. The resulting novel may tell us something about the author's psychology, but it tells us very little about life.

A matter of history

Alan Brownjohn

JOHN BANVILLE

The Newton Letter

82pp. Secker and Warburg. £5.95.

0 436 03265 1

"I have abandoned my book", writes John Banville's unnamed narrator at the very beginning of *The Newton Letter*, "real people keep getting in the way". The real reader could be forgiven for hoping that the brief span of the novel will indeed allow flesh and blood to allow their way through tha introspective musings of the historian who is telling this tale instead of finishing his life of the great astronomer. As it is, people receive too rare a chance to emerge from the all-too-delicate prose and unobtrusive symbolism. Thla a slim book inside which a fatter one is struggling to get out.

The historian has rented a holiday cottage somewhare within reach of Dublin to get on with his work. The place is the former lodge at the approach to Fern House, which stands a couple of hundred yards away, visible, and fascinating to a lonely scholar. The inhabitants of this broken-down mansion are equally interesting: the middle-aged Lawlessea, Edward and Charlotta, he drunken and tamely boorish, she graceful and distant; Ottilie, their niece, twenty-four, blonde, purposeless and vaguely handsome; and a child who might belong either to the older couple or to Ottilie. The narrator assumes they are protestants and patricians; the trappings of aristocracy have disappeared and "only style remains". The life of Newton recedes into the distance.

In the midst of what might seem an inevitable affair with Ottilie, the narrator senses a secret sharer attending on his enthusiastic yet uncasy love-making, and he becomes aware that he has fallen in love with Charlotte (who has hardly spoken to him), instead. In no elusive way, thesa passages are sensitively contrived: Ottilie is the more real; Charlotte is a passion of the mind, and their relationship always "would teeter on the brink of being something". Thus it is with the novel itself. Its apparent message is that reality is not to be deciphered by casual assumptions. The mysterious child belongs to neither woman, and has been adopted by the childless older couple: he revealed eventually as dying of cancer, she cocooned in tranquillizers. But all this is less convincing than some almost incidental episodes in tbis short tale: *The Newton Letter* is oo the brink of being something, when the author occasionally lifts his gaze from the tiny, enigmatic scenes which he finds so absorbing.

Two compelling moments when the outside world walks into Fern House suggest the vigour which has been inexplicably rejected in favour of a minimalism which ends up as merely decorative and aimless. Relations of the Lawlesses turn up for the afternoon, and a tense tea punctuatad by family indiscretions and crude political talk turns into a strange session of drinking and dancing. Later in the novel a local seedman calls in to dine with Edward and Charlotte end make an offer for the decaying mansioo. In both scenes the atmosphere is perfect, and Mr Banville sets his characters in motion at last with a speed and sureness of touch which give more than a hint of the life that could have been injected into these frail, melancholy existences.

Bent on destruction

Stanley Weintraub

ARNOLD SILVER
Bernard Shaw: The Darker Side
353pp. Stanford University Press. $25.
0 8047 1091 0

Arnold Silver has identified "a basic and hitherto unrecognized conflict" in Bernard Shaw, "between his humane and destructive impulses, with the latter seen to possess homicidal and sadomassochistic features". Silver postulates that these elements, which he visualizes as diminuting the playwright's life, thought and work, emerged from unresolved oedipal relationships. This pathology, he theorizes, which came to a climax in his sexual rejection by Stella ("Mrs Pat") Campbell, the Eliza Doolittle of *Pygmalion*, impelled Shaw to pursue bitter revenge against her which further accentuated the "homicidal" qualities of his subsequent plays, from *Heartbreak House* on. Playgoers who have found Shavian drama cerebral and bloodless will brush Silver's theory aside, but those who sense in Shaw's theatre a fertile subconscious life and a passionate active life upon which he drew for character and situation, will want to examine the alleged "darker side".

Silver begins with a premise borrowed from a fascinating piece of biographical detective work published in 1964 by B. C. Rosset and now out of print, *Shaw of Dublin: The Formative Years*. The kernal of Rosset's book, supported by circumstantial evidence both in and out of the plays, was that Shaw worried all his life that he might not have been his father's son, but was instead the offspring of his mother's ubiquitous music tutor, O. J. Vandeleur Lee, and that his uncertainties about his paternity entered into the inner life of his plays. Silver's follow-up is that Shaw had to create for himself a stainless "Virgin Mother" figure in life as well as in art to symbolize an untainted Mrs Shaw, and that the obsession exacerbated oedipal dilemmas which in most men fade with maturity. Silver sees *Pygmalion*, in which Henry Higgins is clearly warped by a mother fixation, as the crucial work in the Shavian canon, for the play was written for an actress with whom Shaw was in love, and who would, between the completion of the play and its production, refuse to bed down with him; thus preserving their mutual virtue (and Shaw's unconsummated marriage with Charlo(ta), but incurring his implacable enmity.

For Silver, *Candida* becomes the first key play, in fact Shaw's self-confessed "Virgin Mother" play. Silver recognizes no irony in Shaw (an writing.) in the eighteen-year-old poet Eugene Marchbanks's unrequited passion for a thirty-three-year-old mother, Candida Morell, he sees powerful oedipal passions stirring, the "emotional strength" in the play emanating from the author's "lifelong involvement with his own mother". A thirty-eight-year-old bachelor, Shaw was still living in Fitzroy Square with his mother when he wrote *Candida*. His mistress, the actress Florence Farr, lived on the other side of London, in a flat in Hammersmith. Since his income from writing was still very small, he had little alternative. However, he and his mother, as Shaw's diaries make clear, saw little of each other except in passing, and he rarely sat down to a meal with her, rising late to prepare his own grim breakfasts and eating lunches and dinners at vegetarian restaurants. Now and then a rare tea with Lucinda Shaw (when there was a guest) was so remarkable an occurrence as to be recorded in his diary.

Still, Silver sees *Candida* as a pervasively oedipal fantasy, which – if it is – appears to be of the strange variety in which the young man is terrified of sex and relieved to be rescued from imminent seduction by the fortuitous return of Candido's husband. Shaw's actual mother play, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* – its Lady Cicely role written five years later for Ellen Terry, because she had complained to Shaw that there were no romantic parts for a grandmother – gets only a single sentence in *The Darker Side*. Yet the manly Brassbound pants for the somewhat older Lady Cicely, desiring in her the mother he has never known as well as a wife; but she opts to remain free.

At the time Shaw wrote *Brassbound* he had just wed Charlotte in a marriage which was to remain, at her insistence and to Shaw's disappointment, unconsummated. As has been shown by earlier critics, the evidences of the celibate marriage and Shaw's feelings were long reflected in the plays he wrote. Silver, however, sees Shaw's turning away from physical sex in later plays as a subconscious means of avoiding psychologically "the crime of incest and its attendant punishment of castration". Besides, he adds in all seriousness, "Charlotte's virginity within marriage proved, retroactively, as it were, that Lucinda Shaw had been chaste in *her* marriage, was in a sense a virgin mother, . . . not disloyal to the boy who had worshiped her."

Shaw's escalating involvement with Mrs Campbell a dozen years after his marriage becomes for Silver a gloss on *Pygmalion* as well as a major inspiration for it. Although, like most of Shavian theatre, it is drawn from a complex strand of motives and sources, it is also well established from a letter to Ellen Terry, as well as Shaw's dramatic reviews, that he had succumbed to the allure of Stella Campbell in the middle 1890s and was already thinking about writing a play in which she would be a Cockney flower-girl. Composed from March to June 1912, it was in part, as Silver suggests, an ecstatic love-offering to Mrs. Campbell, who had reciprocated Shaw's feelings sufficiently to tease him into all sorts of infidelities to Charlotte except, possibly, the final one. There are even a few lines in the play which have their parallels in Shaw's letters to Mrs Campbell. The major problem in seeing *Pygmalion* as a lens upon the relationship and upon Shaw's final rejection, is that he finished the play long before the affair reached its apogee – or its end, with Stella's spurning of him in August 1913. "One must resist the thought that Shaw kept consulting his play as the relationship with Mrs Campbell proceeded", Silver writes. Yet he himself cannot resist it, and is forced, finally, since the play will not prove his interpretation, to turn to the much later film. There, he sees Higgins softened sympathetically, and Eliza now "tortured" – Shaw having nursed his cruelty toward Mrs Campbell until the opportunity to alter "her" play arose.

The allegations that he "improved" Higgins at the expense of a more brutalized Eliza are neither accurate nor credible, although film direction and box-office casting did romanticize Higgins. Even into the 1930s, however, when Mrs Campbell needed money, and Shaw refused to let her publish his letters (which would have hurt Charlotte), he had every reason to recall his frustrations with her and her stage partner, Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Their deliberate sentimentalization had distorted *Pygmalion*'s brilliantly brittle, ironic lines. Silver ignores that aspect of the play's first run in which Mrs Pat and Beerbohm Tree added impromptu dialogue to suggest that Eliza would return to stay, and even embraced passionately at the curtain calls to suggest the sentimental close which Shaw's ironies forbade.

The woman who had first played Eliza had wronged him doubly. However much Shaw may have forced his attentions upon her, she had reciprocated them. In its first run in London she had spurned his play, as she did him, by the perverse way in which she played it. Yet during the war years, when – more difficult in personality than ever – she was unable to secure new roles and was ageing unattractively into her fifties, Shaw loyally permitted her to play the bread-and-butter rôle of the eighteen-year-old Eliza. But he would not have her play other rôles unsuited to her failing powers – a practice in which he was far from alone among playwrights – even when, as in *Heartbreak House*, he wrote a rôle (Hesione Hushabye) based upon memories of her siren days, or, as in *The Apple Cart*, an "interlude" about the King's "official" mistress, Orinthia, which portrayed the 1912–13 Shaw–Stella episode with nostalgic inaccuracy.

It was no "vendetta" Shaw pursued in not offering a faded actress to whom few others offered new rôles any of his own, especially when she would have been miscast in them. Silver, however, sees "the playwright's revenge" (actually the title of his final chapter) as increasingly "sadomasochistic", turning Shaw more and more into a "homicidal" misogynist. A favourite rhetorical strategy in the book is the assumption of the reader's acceptance of authorial logic at every stage. Thus Silver concludes, having "established" our belief in his vendetta theory (with its inexorably oedipal origins), "We may therefore reasonably connect Shaw's annihilation of the beautiful girl who represents love in *The Simpleton* of 1934, or his torture of Eliza Doolittle in the [film] revisions to *Pygmalion* of 1934–38, with his defense of Mussolini's 1935 bombings of Abyssinia and of Stalin's bloodthirsty purges of the 1930s."

It is incontestably true that Bernard Shaw was a complex and sometimes infuriating creative personality. Disappointed with the failures of between-the-war democracies, he stubbornly flirted with more extreme solutions as to how man might be more effectively governed. And in both his prose and his plays he insisted that one had to earn one's right to live. We could do with a serious study of how much of these later writings is aberrant (and why), and how much dramatic metaphor intended to provoke a listless West into solving its problems before it went under. Silver's own study cannot be taken seriously, however, when he concludes, "My point is that Shaw's emotional involvement with killing increased, as did the frequency of his advocating it, after the sexual frustrations of his marriage had begun to take hold on his thought." Moreover, one can read this tidy oversimplification as early as page 20. There Silver observes confidently, "I was particularly loath to exclude such outstanding plays as *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Major Barbara*, *Heartbreak House* and *Saint Joan*. These will receive full consideration to future volumes of this study."

None of us is without a darker side, and Shaw's psychology, since it gave energy to the most significant body of writing for the English stage since Shakespeare, is worth examining. It is difficult to lend much credence, however, to Silver's more extreme claims.

Irreparably estranged

Brian Rotman

JOHN ORR
Tragic Drama and Modern Society
280pp. Macmillan. £15.
0 333 24083 9

The idea of tragedy has a wide currency. We speak of tragic accidents, tragic lives, tragic stories, tragic mistakes, and of course tragic plays. On the principle that life imitates art, some of these senses spring from our notion of tragedy on the stage, though the reverse is clearly true, too. John Orr's book, though a sociological study of drama and society, does not concern itself with any social (non-theatrical) sense of "tragic". His concern is the neo-Aristotelian one of categorization: what is a modern tragedy as it is to be found in the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Casey, O'Neill, Williams, Miller?

In the beginning was Greek tragedy: universal man's fate played out in the presence of the gods. Then Renaissance: the "doomed grandeur" of men-as-noble, while his feudal rank and person are pulled apart. After this the true theatre went dark, to be reopened by Ibsen as the "tragedy of bourgeois alienation" in which modern (bourgeois) man acts out his isolation and estrangement from (bourgeois) society.

How are we to recognize such an acting out, John Orr asks? By the presence in a play of "tragic strife", which is a stylistic confrontation between the dramatis personae and the cultural values of the bourgeois social order". A play is a tragedy if such strife is the dramatic resolution of social alienation,

> a movement present in the social fabric of the theme and equally in the sequential flow of the action itself. Within this flow the traditional Aristotelian elements are usually incorporated and given social resonance. The reversal of personal fortune becomes a key element in the dynamic process of estrangement, the self-recognition of tragic fate a liberating of social consciousness which comes too late to alter the experience of loss.

Orr finds it of primary significance that the tragedy of bourgeois alienation originated in Norway, Russia and Ireland, in the cultural outskirts of Europe. For here, not only were the bourgeoisie estranged from their own social order, but this very order was subject to a dislocating dialectic of periphery against centre, giving to the oppositions of noble/bourgeois and family/society the further tragic dimension of wilderness/civilization; an opposition invisible within the cultural centres of London and Paris.

In Orr's conception tragedy is realist in its subject-matter and naturalistic in its theatrical form. It portrays "irreparable human loss" suffered by socially and domestically rooted individuals. It operates, as Orr repeatedly says, within the conventions of "figural realism". Consequently Orr has little to say about the possibilities of tragic theme arising from the theatre of mask, verse, mime, music and ritual. What he does offer is a solid original survey of realist tragedy from Ibsen to Arthur Miller; well researched and full of examples of close textual attention to particular plays, so that many interesting and intelligent points are made. He also makes some not so intelligent points – or rather employs a not so intelligent strategy. His account is constantly distorted by the attempt to identify Twin Great Tragedies. The medal – "a tragedy" – is pinned only on plays that exhibit "authentic" tragic strife, deep-rooted bourgeois alienation and so on. Thus, Ibsen achieves it, for example, in *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm* and *John Gabriel Borkman*, but not in *Ghosts*, *The Doll's House* or *The Master Builder*. (*When We Dead Awaken*, patently not about bourgeois alienation, isn't mentioned.) Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* (despite Chekhov's refusal of the epithet) are authentic tragedies; *The Three Sisters* isn't. And so it goes through the plays of Yeats and Synge to O'Casey whose *Shadow of the Gunman* gets the medal; and then, via a highly tenuous "Irish connection", to O'Neill, whose *Long Day's Journey Into Night* provides Orr with the most perfect and total example of tragic bourgeois alienation:

> . . . O'Neill among all modern writers has produced the most prophetic vision of human extinction on a scale made possible by nuclear war. The personal darkness is also the darkness of the universe as a whole. It is a darkness more intense and resounding than anything Beckett subsequently created during a period when the possibility became widely known, and it ranges back and forth without constraint from the personal to the social and from the social to the universal. The night of O'Neill's play is the darkness of the twentieth century fully brought to light. Concentrated in the life of one family, it explodes outwards to embrace the whole of modern civilisation.

O'Neill's dark, over-written lament of fog and suffocation is undoubtedly an important play. But Orr's eulogy is overblown, his swipe at Beckett critically fatuous, and his inclusion of nuclear war is just rhetoric. The result is a celebration that says more about Orr's enthralment with bourgeois realism than it does about modern society or the status of O'Neill within twentieth-century theatre.

A consequence of Orr's unwillingness to distance himself from the tragic fireworks of bourgeois realism is a feeling of unease and irritation: one feels bludgeoned by the narrowness of his principle of selectio and boxed in by all the unnecessary moral-pianing. Thus, for example, French theatre is never mentioned, presumably because it produced no tragedies of bourgeois alienation, but several pages and much fuss are devoted to the plays of the Irish dramatist F. C. Murray.

A more serious distortion occurs with Brecht. Orr is too informed and intelligent not to recognize the importance of epic theatre and Brecht's critique of illusionism. But he is completely out of sympathy with either the motives or the achievements of Brecht's programme. His isolation of Brecht within a short and bitty chapter called *Germany's Political Theatre* has the effect of avoiding all the questions by preventing Brecht's notions from impinging on his own idea of tragedy. He fails to discuss except through cursory remarks any single play by Brecht, and trents him backhandedly by examining in detail Gunter Grass's *The Plebeians Rehearse an Uprising* – a clever Brechtian satire on Brecht himself. Now it may be (as Steiner wants to argue in *The Death of Tragedy*) that the promise of salvation inherent in Marxism means that Marxism is incapable of providing an ideological or metaphysical backdrop against which "tragedy" can be written – tragedy being about that which cannot be salved. Unfortunately Orr doesn't address the issue, since his uncritical acceptance of the formulaic "irreparable human loss" begs the question. Much turns on "irreparable": it was Brecht's contribution to theatre to have invented a dramatic form in which the all too reparable losses of humanity *are* able to wear the mask of tragedy. There is great anguish, human loss and waste portrayed in *Mother Courage and her Children*, and if the play doesn't fit into Orr's conception of a tragedy, then so much the worse for "tragedy".

Last month saw the publication of *Essays and Studies 1982: The Poet's Power* collected by Suheil Badi (124pp. John Murray, for the English Association. £8.50. 0 7195 3950 0). The editor, Professor of English and Anglo-Irish Literature at the American University of Beirut and a specialist of Arabic literature, has obtained contributions that treat the theme of his subtitle through several ages of English literature: "Realism and Approximations: Sources of Chaucer's Power" by Robert Burchfield; "The Poet and Taboo: The Riddle of Shakespeare's 'Perdita'" by John Pitcher; "The Appropriation of Milton" by Barnard Sharratt; "Pope's Wasteland: Reflections on Mock-Heroic" by Claude Rawson; "Blake: The Poet as Prophet" by Kathleen Raine; "Tennyson and Some Doubts" by Alastair Thomson; and "Yeats: The Poet as Hero" by Professor Bushrui himself.

Prophecies of progression

Raymond Lister

ROBERT N. ESSICK and MORTON D. PALEY
Robert Blair's The Grave: Illustrated by William Blake
243pp. Scolar Press. £45.
0 85967 529 7

Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley have for some time collaborated in the examination of William Blake's illustrations for Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*. As long ago as 1975 they published in *The Book Collector* a valuable study of the printings of this work. The present book now collects the results of all these researches.

The Grave was an unlucky work for Blake. It should at last have given him a popular reputation but it did little more than bring him a miserable twenty guineas. The engravings were commissioned by Robert Hartley Cromek. Blake wrote to his former patron William Hayley in 1805, giving him the news of this, adding that, "I produced about twenty Designs which pleas'd so well that he, with the same liberality with which he set me about the Drawings, has now set me to Engrave them."

But Cromek, despite publicly announcing that the engravings – a more financially rewarding job than the designs – were to be by Blake, gave them over to the conventional Louis Schiavonetti. Blake was indignant, but impotent; however he made a further drawing to accompany some lines in which he dedicated his illustrations to Queen Charlotte, asking Cromek to pay him four guineas for it. It is a beautiful drawing, rightly compared by Essick and Paley with the title page of *The Book of Thel*, but Cromek rejected it together with Blake's request for four guineas, in a letter that would be difficult to equal for supercilious arrogance. Little wonder that Blake referred to him in his Notebook as "Bob Screwmuch".

Much was lost to posterity through Cromek's perfidy. It is thought that Blake would have executed the engravings in white line; his white-line design "Death's Door" is reproduced on plate 13 of this book, and the authors think this was used for the "Specimen of the Stile of Engraving" advertised in Cromek's first prospectus for *The Grave*. Its rugged simplicity recalls many designs in the illuminated books, including *America*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. It has a quality suggesting that the design was released from the plate, as described in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake speaks of "printing in the infernal method, by corrosives . . . melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid."

Whatever we may think of Schiavonetti's engraving (actually a mixture of etching and engraving or drypoint) of the same design, there is nothing in it of "displaying the infinite which was hid". It is a thoroughly ordinary interpretation of Blake's concept, using contemporary conventions of shading and modelling that any engraver might have used to reproduce any design by any artist. It says much for Blake that his designs retain much of their power after this treatment, despite the absence of the grandeur his own engraving would have imparted to them as the authors rightly comment, Schiavonetti's interpretations "substitute competence for genius".

Blake made a number of designs rejected by Cromek. These, with preliminary sketches for the accepted designs, are included and the rejection of some of them is somewhat surprising. "The Gambols of Ghosts" for instance. This drawing, now in the Yale Centre for British Art, was to illustrate the lines:

> Well do I know thee by thy trusty yew,
> Cheerless, unsocial plant! that loves to dwell
> 'Midst sculls and coffins, epitaphs and worms;
> Where light-heel'd ghosts and visionary shades,
> Beneath the wan cold moon (as fame reports)
> Embodied thick, perform their mystic rounds.

But it is a crowded and complicated design and perhaps Cromek thought that one such design – "The Day of Judgment" – was enough; or perhaps Schiavonetti demanded more pay to engrave such a detailed subject.

In 1963 Brown University Press issued a facsimile of these illustrations, with a commentary by S. Foster Damon, under the title of *Blake's Grave*. Foster Damon believed that Blake despised Blair's poem and used the illustrations to make a separate visual "poem" of his own. There is much to be said for this view, for Blake's mind was always independent. Moreover the author of the commentary on the designs in the original edition (probably Benjamin Heath Malkin) wrote: "These Designs, detached from the Work they embellish, form of themselves a most interesting Poem." This was preceded by the comment: "By the arrangement here made, the regular progression of Man, from his first descent into the Vale of Death, to his last admission into Life eternal, is exhibited." Damon claimed that this meant that such arrangement, "is to be understood as a Prophetic Book".

The present authors do not go so far as that, but they are aware of an independent approach on Blake's part and of a certain rhythmic arrangement of the plates, which they claim fall naturally into pairs:

> Plate 1, arising from the grave –
> Plate 7, descending into the grave
>
> Plate 2, Christ descending –
> Plate 8, Christ enthroned with the redeemed rising
>
> Plate 3, companions in heaven –
> Plate 4, companions in the tomb
>
> Plate 5, death of the wicked man –
> Plate 10, death of the good man
>
> Plate 6, parting of soul and body –
> Plate 12, reunion of soul and body
>
> Plate 9, the soul entering the tomb with the body above –
> Plate 11, the body entering the tomb with the soul above.

Blake's own ideas come through in several ways. The soul, for example, in Plates 6 and 12, is shown as female, though the body is male. This agrees with Blake's idea of the female Emanation or *anima*, the source of man's inspiration, which is often submerged in the earthly life, but which joins his spiritual body in Eternity. This differs completely from Blair's concept which sees the soul and the body as two separate entities.

As for Blair's poem, this, the most famous poem of the "Graveyard School" was printed in edition after edition for at least a century after its first publication in 1743, yet is now hardly read at all. Some idea of its popularity in certain puritan circles during the nineteenth century may be gathered from the amusing incident in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, when the child Edmund, at a party, was asked if he would recite "some sweet stanzas", and repeated some lines from *The Grave*, one of the books his puritan father allowed him to read:

> If death were nothing, and nought after death;
> If when men died at once they ceas'd to be,
> Returning to the barren womb of nothing
> Whence first they sprung, then might the debauchee . . .

He was quickly stopped by his hostess's sister, who said firmly, "Thank you dear, that will do nicely!"

There is a world of difference between Blair's "barren womb of nothing" and Blake's vision of consummation, at the end of *Jerusalem*:

> All Human Forms identified, even Tree, Metal, Earth & Stone: all
> Human Forms identified, living, going forth & returning wearied
> Into the Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours; reposing,
> And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

But Blake has imparted something of this vision to his designs for *The Grave*, emasculated though they are by Schiavonetti's treatment.

This book is beautifully produced, though in the reviewer's copy there are a few of those blemishes apparently inseparable from the photo-lithographic process. But on the whole Blake and the authors have been served well. It is a pity that the authors give only references to quotations from Blake in David V. Erdman's *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*; it would not have been much extra trouble to quote them also in Sir Geoffrey Keynes's *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, still to many scholars the main work of reference.

In between brush-strokes

Mary Lutyens

MARY LAGO (Editor)
Burne-Jones Talking, His Conversations 1895–1898: Preserved by his studio assistant Thomas Rooke.
216pp. John Murray. £12.50.
0 7195 3891 2

Burne-Jones's pictures were the first I loved, long before I knew his name. A large engraving of "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid" hung on the stairs of my grandmother's house; the maidens descending "The Golden Staircase" were all dressed in the Fortuny gowns my mother used to wear; my godmother, Lady Jekyll, was a daughter of William Graham, Burne-Jones's chief patron, and staying with her was to live in his ambiance, surrounded by his tapestries; the wings of his angels protected me from night-terrors.

Judging from the prices his pictures now fetch in the sale-rooms his star is again in the ascendant. Success did not come to him until the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, when he was nearly forty-four, and lasted less than twenty years. He never became a rich man and had to go on working hard until his death, but, then, he would not have cared to go on living without painting. Thomas Rooke (1842–1942) was Burne-Jones's studio assistant from 1869 until his master's death in 1898, aged sixty-four.

Rooke was a talented watercolourist (one of his few oil pictures, "The Story of Ruth", is in the Tate Gallery) and an excellent copyist, especially of architecture. He went abroad for Burne-Jones, who disliked travelling in later life, to copy old buildings in danger of restoration, and was "borrowed" by Ruskin to paint St Mark's in Venice. It was not until the beginning of 1895, however, that Rooke began to make notes of Burne-Jones's conversation. Rooke's manuscript has disappeared but a transcript of it by Lady Burne-Jones, consisting of 416 closely written foolscap pages, survives and it is this third-hand text that Mary Lago expertly annotated and introduced.

In 1894 Burne-Jones had accepted a baronetcy for the sake of his ambitious artist son, Philip, and to the disgust of his beloved friend, William Morris, who had become a vociferous socialist. When these recorded conversations start, Burne-Jones was living with his wife, Georgiana Macdonald, whom he married in 1860, in a house with a large garden, The Grange, North End Road, Fulham, where he had two studios. He also owned two cottages knocked into one at Rottingdean. Always tired, frequently ill and hopelessly untidy, he would chatter away to Rooke about anything that came into his head as the two men worked together, often on the same canvas. Rooke made notes of his master's utterances which he afterwards transferred more fully to his notebook.

Burne-Jones was a passionate romantic, nurtured on the Arthurian legends, a worshipper of goodness and beauty, yet no puritan; he complained of Georgie's ugly "Baptist bonnets and frocks" (she was the daughter of a Methodist Minister). He believed in courtly love ("... there is one subject I will not read ever and that is treachery in love – I cannot bear it), he told Rooke), and his own infidelities, though perhaps only of the heart, were anguish to him. He was nearly always in love, while continuing to love Georgie, and for one woman, Mary Zambaco, he almost broke up his home.

Lady Burne-Jones tells us in her *Memorials* that her husband had a beautiful voice; one can believe it, just as one believes that Rooke captured his master's turn of phrase exactly. The conversations show that Burne-Jones had a robust, highly critical, playful side to him in contrast to the idyllic languor of his pictures. This contrast is emphasized in his sketches, mostly self-caricatures, reproduced for this book together with other well-chosen illustrations. He had been elected an Associate Member of the Royal Academy in 1885 but resigned after eight years, never having been granted full membership. He said he had never sold a picture at a gallery in his life. His comment to Rooke – "Lots of pictures I remember in the Academy that will smell of mutton chops till the very end" – is wonderfully evocative of Victorian stuffiness.

Events of 1895–98 which Burne-Jones comments on are the Oscar Wilde trial, the Ruskin v. Whistler trial, the Venezuelan border crisis, the Jameson Raid and Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. His anti-imperialism is forcefully expressed: ". . . the English are, I must say, born pirates. If they'd hoist the Black Flag and skull and cross-bones instead of the Union Jack I'd say be hanged to you and do as you like – but they are such damned hypocrites with it all." He also talked a great deal about his work, past and current, and that of other artists, and discoursed on his relationships with Ruskin, Morris and Rossetti. The impressionists he was, naturally, violently opposed to; the picture he considered "the finest in the world" was Van Eyck's "Arnolfini Marriage".

Mary Lago is to be congratulated on bringing to such vivid life this lovable, tender, fallible man who up to the day of his death from heart failure, aged far beyond his years by the violence of his emotions and rejected by the public like "a discarded mistress", as he said, was still striving to bring beauty into an unlovely materialistic world in his great unfinished picture "The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon".

Back to the Brotherhood

Kate Flint

CHRISTOPHER WOOD
The Pre-Raphaelites
160pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £18.
0 297 78007 7

The Pre-Raphaelites offer seductive material for a picture book. Their intensity of illumination, their faithfully Ruskinian notation of minute natural detail, their love of patterned textiles and brocade, arranged on crowded canvases whose symbolic overtones allow them to transcend the weary verisimilitude of nineteenth-century narrative painting: all this, in recent years, has become familiar enough. *The Pre-Raphaelites* is beautifully produced and in it Christopher Wood regales us with the old favourites: "Ophelia", The Hireling Shepherd", "The Last of England". Moreover, he rightly attempts to broaden the basis of Pre-Raphaelite study. Instead of prolonging discussion of the original members of the Brotherhood and the impact which their early, spikily Gothic works had on the contemporary art scene, he introduces other painters who became converted to their blend of delicate observation with literary mysticism. Arthur Hughes's "April Love" shows him adapting Tennyson's treatment of painful emotion in the modern world. Less well known is the same artist's recourse to the *Idylls of the King*, central to the Pre-Raphaelite critical canon: in "The Brave Geraint", the hero sentimentally tickles Enid's auburn hair with a bluebell. Romantic medievalism also informs the work of nearly forgotten artists: John S. Clifton's "Lover" shows a lyre-plucking suitor urgently conducting his wooing by the side of an ivy and virginia-creeper covered mausoleum, while, slipping down the social scale, William Windus's "Burd Helen" runs painfully by the side of her simpering, faithless lover across the most barren and stony of Scottish moors.

Wood devotes the central section of his book to Pre-Raphaelite landscape. Again, it is the unfamiliar which makes the greatest impact. Webbe's "Twilight", characteristic of the movement in its near-surreal accumulation of meticulously painted minutiae, presents, through the deep emerald gloom, a sinister staring match between rabbit and hawk; Bell Scott's "The Gloaming" has a Friedrich-like intensity about its chilly evening light. But Wood's greatest enthusiasm seems reserved for his examination of the later years of Pre-Raphaelitism and its relationship with the Aesthetic Movement. He writes with emotional reverence of the romantic dreams of Rossetti and Burne-Jones. Clearly, what appeals most is the escapism inherent in Blessed Damozels and Sleeping Princesses surrounded by briar roses; in the glazing gaze of Waterhouse's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" or Strudwick's "The Music of a Bygone Age"; at one point Wood makes his position clear, by referring, in relation to twentieth-century art, to "the destructive forces of modernism".

Visually, *The Pre-Raphaelites* fulfils Wood's aim of presenting a balanced picture of the movement: the lesser-known alongside the established, the later period complementing the earlier. But his prose is flat, his commentary on the familiar often trite. Despite stating in his introduction that an extraordinary amount of literature has hitherto been devoted to the private lives of the artists concerned, this implicit condemnation does not stop him resorting to the stuff of which Pre-Raphaelite gossip columns are made: Lizzie Siddal was called "Guggums" by Rossetti; Ruskin took fright when faced with public hair; "to have an affair with a working girl was part of many Victorian artists' code of chivalry." Certainly, as he points out, there is scholarly research still to be done on the movement – on Holman Hunt, Millais and Madox Brown in particular. Perhaps more fascinating than studies of these individuals would be the consideration of a theme relegated by Wood to his postscript: the fall and rise in popularity of Pre-Raphaelite art. He generalizes, vaguely, that "we now live in a more romantic age" than our parents did, but never clarifies his reasoning. The key to Pre-Raphaelites and New Romantics alike would seem to lie in conspicuous escapism: the author is unlikely to be alone in seeking solace through the material presented in this lavish coffee-table ornament.

All for the republic

Maurice Larkin

J. P. T. BURY
Gambetta's Final Years: "The Era of Difficulties" 1877–1882
392pp. Longman. £18.50.
0 582 50302 7

J. P. T. Bury's trilogy on the life and times of Gambetta is in the steadfast tradition of British political biography. It is meticulous, finely written, and firmly chronological in structure – with general comments and assessments largely confined to the conclusion. Given the author's other commitments and publications, it has been longer in the making than the lifespan of its hero – the first volume appearing in 1936, and the second in 1973.

Reassuringly, the third volume contains few major surprises, its detail and comment largely strengthening the accepted picture of Gambetta. With the hindsight of history and with the knowledge of his early death at forty-four from peritonitis, it is tempting to discount this final stage in his career as a mixture of missed opportunities and initiatives that came to nothing. Yet this is to ignore the importance that contemporaries attached to these activities, and the admiration in which he was held, particularly by his enemies. Bismarck coupled him with Napoleon as one of the great leaders of the French nation – tartly remarking that neither was French. And the German Emperor, Wilhelm I, on hearing of his death, told his officers, "You can unsaddle your horses, and look forward to a long peace." For Dr Bury, his importance is self-evident: "he played a leading part in defending the provisional Republic in 1870–1, in founding the definitive one in 1875, in defending it again in 1877, and in giving it direction in the years that followed". Yet he held ministerial office for no more than seven and a half months in his lifetime – of which only two and a half lie in the years covered by this volume, 1877 to 1882. And although the position of President (ie, Speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies carried its own particular prestige and influence, its impact on the course of events was indirect.

Bury carefully examines Gambetta's role as would-be maker and breaker of ministries behind the scenes. Yet his strength of personality and his ability to influence those in office is not easily conveyed, despite his flamboyance and reputation. His force does not permeate his correspondence and recorded utterances as it does with Clemenceau – for all the exuberance of his oratory – and there is a sense in which the modern reader has to take his strength on trust. He was unquestionably feared and obstructed by many of his contemporaries, who accused him of seeking to dominate the system with the intention of reinforcing the executive at the expense of the parliamentary factions. Indeed his own brief term as prime minister was cut short on a modest issue of constitutional reform.

The impression that emerges is of a man of energy, common sense and humanity; but whether he was a man of much intellectual or cultural depth is not revealed in this essentially political study, where the non-political content is largely confined to Gambetta's travels, his loyalty towards friends and relatives, and his state of health. His mistress, Léonie Léon, was both a sustaining influence and a source of anxiety, her periodic pessimism and reluctance to marry him being an unsettling factor during his last years. As to his convictions, he declared in 1876, "I deny the absolute everywhere, and I belong to a school which believes only in the relative, in analysis, in observation, in the study of facts." As Bury says, "For him . . . the nearest to any absolutes were three basic concepts, universal suffrage, the Republic and the *patrie*." "Social reforms *per se* did not loom large on Gambetta's agenda . . . since he and his friends had always given priority to political reforms, many of which still had to be achieved." "He believed that . . . free compulsory lay education [was] 'the instrument of emancipation par excellence'." One would nevertheless have welcomed more information on Gambetta's views on social insurance – notably accident insurance and provision for old age, which he actively espoused in 1881 and which he partly saw as a means of checking socialism. He was also anxious to facilitate the growth of workers' unions, although, like other eminent statesmen of the left, he did not scruple to use troops to end strikes.

He is consistently revealed as much more flexible and accommodating than the popular image that was held of him. The proclaimer of "Clericalism, there is the enemy!" understood the necessity of establishing a *modus vivendi* with the Church, and thought it possible under the new Pope, Leo XIII – although it was left to Gambetta's disciple, Eugène Spuller, to make it a reality in the 1890s. In similar fashion, his legendary patriotism and commitment to recovering Alsace-Lorraine did not preclude an accommodation with Germany – indeed the two goals might be complementary. One of the many sad tales in these years of disappointment was the long saga of his abortive attempts to have a private meeting with Bismarck – an episode with a wistful pendant, when Gambetta filched one of the Iron Chancellor's pipes as a souvenir when visiting the great man's residence as a tourist. And if the lost provinces always loomed large in Gambetta's thoughts, they did not prevent him advocating a forward policy in Tunisia and elsewhere, despite accusations that overseas ventures were a distraction from the sacred task of regaining the blue line of the Vosges.

A long biography of a short life leaves plenty of room for background and anecdote. Bury's expertise in the political and diplomatic history of the Third Republic gives the reader a valuable bonus in his survey and analysis of the issues that dominated the period; and the book is rich in piquant and unexpected facts and phrases. For Gambetta the Russian Empire was "barbarism lit by gas"; and we are told, among much other domestic detail, that his official bedroom when President of the Chamber of Deputies stank, because its previous occupant, the Shah of Persia, used to urinate in the corners. On other pages, we find Gambetta trying hard to obtain a bishopric for his mistress's confessor, and inviting her to let him know whom she wanted decorated, "for in these days of cheap favours one can't stake one's claims too soon".

Dr Bury is no less forthcoming on Gambetta's posthumous career. His spiritual legacy was a disputed one: Opportunists and Radicals fought over different strands of his democratic ideals, while the Nationalists laid claim to his patriotism. His body suffered the same fate. His heart went to the Laboratoire de l'Ecole de l'Anthropologie, his heart to the Panthéon, his right eye to the Cahors museum to be displayed in a bottle, and what was left was allowed to lie in Nice. Dr Bury's prime achievement is to show us what they all added up to in his lifetime, before the warring factions got hold of them.

The style of the left

Steven Englund

PATRICK H. HUTTON
The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1893
218pp. University of California Press. £17.25.
0 520 04114 3

To study the republican parties and their ideology of *la nation* in France in the 150 years following the Great Revolution, is to pass from "citoyen" to "bourgeois", or, simply, from left to right. Patrick Hutton travels the well-known route, but with new companions, the Blanquists, that very French variant of the pre-Marxist conspiratorial revolutionary. They reward him with an almost theatrical evolution – from the radical atheism of Gustave Tridon, in the 1860s through Communard nationalism and Boulangist populism to the national socialism of Ernest Granger in the 1890s.

Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), the earliest of the "professional revolutionaries", was one of the most prepossessing ideologues ever to emerge on the left. The heat of his commitment kindled sympathetic fires in the hearts of many hundreds of disciples and abetters – few of whom laid eyes on the Master, who spent most of his life in French prisons. Interlocking biographical sketches of individual Blanquists with analysis of large themes and doctrines, Hutton describes the elements of the Blanquist revolutionary myth – the archetypal hero; conspiratorial praxis; gnostic meanings; "sacred" places and rituals; revolutionary Ur-events; Evil incarnate in political enemies, and other hugger-mugger – than undertakes to show what became of it all.

En route he debunks some received wisdom. As he shows, atheism was *not* tangential to Blanquism; but a central and rich source of political inspiration. The party did *not* play a major role in the Commune – which it saw as "an atheist drama", says Hutton – though a few of its leaders figured signally in the army and police and were largely responsible for the Commune's acts of vengeance on its hostages.

In the late 1870s, the party broke with the Marxists over how to interpret the Commune, and in the 1880s it weighed itself down with what Hutton calls "the politics of anniversary remembrance" – "a dubious source of energy for new beginnings". The Blanquists helped to create the left-wing movement that pressured the Chamber to vote an amnesty for exiled Communards and played a major role in forcing President Grévy's resignation in 1887. The attraction of what Hutton calls "the new mass politics" led the Blanquists into electoral Boulangism in 1889. When it became apparent that the movement was more caesarist than Jacobin, the Blanquists split between the Marxist followers of Vaillant and the obstinate traditionalists led by Granger. The former more or less merged with the Guesdists; the latter, though getting a few of their leaders into the Chamber, lost their corporate existence in the radical *fin-de-siècle* right.

The author writes at the start that "the study of revolutionary thought is of interest not only for its particular ideologies but also for its underlying mentalities" and remains true to his invocation. In other words, we have before us the very model of modern political historiography, a book about "the archaic revolutionary *mentalité*". Hutton's strength as a historian resides in his sensitivity to ideological and personal nuance, and to Clio's irony towards men's intentions. His book offers a fascinating and affecting, if an elegant, portrait of earnest youthfulness that lives on into senescent caricature.

This said, the author's fascination with style is finally less fruitful than trendy. Hutton writes in Chapter Eight ("The Blanquists and Style in Revolutionary Politics") that "Blanqui's life was valued not for his specific accomplishments but for the authenticity of [his] style." He is quick to remark upon the "religious character" of Blanquist dogma, rituals and traditions. Amidst all this cultural anthropology, however, we get too little cogent socio-political analysis. On the contrary, Hutton, like many of the *Annales* historians, risks *depoliticizing* his subject – a serious failing when he is striving to explicate a political party acting in the political arena.

This approach fails most evidently in the chapter dealing with the Boulanger Affair (1887–1891). With the revisionist historians, Hutton sees this entire crucial episode as a left-wing protest – i.e. the way *some* of the original "Boulangist" leadership saw the movement (or made it out to be). This is rather like saying (with Renzo de Felice) that Mussolini was still a revolutionary after 1920. At other times, Hutton simply elides the vital question of the movement's politics by speaking of "the new mass politics", or of "nationalism", or of Boulangism's "revolutionary" thrust – as if such terms carried self-evident political meanings. This elision is unacceptable. Hutton seriously misleads when he states so downrightly that "Blanquist allegiance to Boulangism is therefore not at issue." Of course it is: the Blanquist party fell apart over nothing less. Hutton finds it "ironic that the most ardent advocate among the Blanquists of the new politics [Vaillant] should have been the first to recoil from its implications when these were revealed in the Boulangist movement". Vaillant's action is only "ironic" if one has, a priori, excluded the counter-revolutionary thrust of "the new politics", as Hutton does. But from another perspective – that of many left-wing critics of Boulangism – it was merely an act of discriminating intelligence to descry and decry those elements which showed that Boulangism was *not*, as Hutton supposes, the "configuration of protest [like] those which had preceded the revolutions of 1830 and 1848". Socialists like Vaillant did not break with their old comrades-in-arms over matters of tactics, as Hutton believes; rather, the Vaillantists (among other socialists) saw early on what patriotism was becoming in the hands of the League of Patriots and of the recrudescent "democratic" and "national" right. They denounced to their colleagues the Boulangist-Bonapartist alliance, and they early suspected the royalists' financial support of Boulanger.

Moreover, those socialists who did flock to Boulanger must be studied on a case-by-case basis, not simply labelled "Boulangist", as Hutton labels them here. The results will show that the so-called socialist wing of the movement was among the last to take shape, the least coherent, the first to collapse, and provided the most circumscribed and tactfully self-conscious support that Boulanger "enjoyed". Even Roche and Granger were loath to call themselves Boulangists and were as troubled by the movement's ambivalent attitude towards strikes and unions as they were by Boulanger's and Déroulède's record fighting against the Commune. The life of the political animal is both more subtle and more substantial than *Annales*-type history (usually) permits.

Agents of repression

Eugene Schulkind

ROBERT TOMBS
The War Against Paris 1871
256pp. Cambridge University Press. £22.50 (paperback, £8.50).
0 521 23551 0

With the detachment of a decade one can more readily gain an overall view of the publications generated in the years immediately following the centenary of the 1871 Paris Commune. With a few notable exceptions, most of the books published in Britain have tended to repeat or recast traditional arguments and evidence ranging from the significant to the anecdotal. On the other hand, important original contributions have occasionally emerged from patient research carried out by little-known scholars. The most outstanding (as yet unpublished) example is undoubtedly the brilliant dissertation of 1981 in which Paul Martinez brought together the results of thorough and meticulous research among British and French documentary sources in order to analyse the lives of thousands of individual Parisian men and women who found refuge in Britain during the eight or nine-year period following the Commune's defeat.

This more modest but carefully researched and intelligently argued study by Robert Tombs, of the soldiers and officers of the Versailles army, also required an unconventionally open and perceptive mind. This army, and especially its role in the repression of the *semaine sanglante*, has generally been characterized simply as a reactionary body of men who indulged in a gratuitous bloodbath; its indiscriminate cruelty exacerbated perhaps by the heat of battle. This is merely the reverse side of the historiographical coin which sees the Communards themselves as the same old impulsive Parisian "mob" that has supposedly been associated with revolutionary events there since 1789.

As well as studying the social composition and morale of these soldiers, and recognizing the paucity of evidence that would enable us to penetrate their minds and hearts, Dr Tombs makes all the use he can of clues to their likely attitudes. He is on more solid ground in studying the high-ranking officers who, after the March 18 fraternization with the Parisian populace, never lost sight of the potential political unreliability of their men and of some of the junior officers. This has led him to pay attention also to the extent of disaffection and outright dissent among the soldiers, and the means by which these were dealt with. In short, Tombs traces the systematic transformation of these regiments, from troops ready to fraternize into the obedient military agents of one of the "bloodiest repressions in the history of Europe".

He also debates how far killing was engendered by the heat of combat or was, instead, a deliberate extermination carefully organized by certain officers and the special police attached to military units. Inevitably, he is brought to examine the extent to which Thiars and some of the generals were involved in, or at least fully aware of the preparation and execution of the slaughter, as well as the extent to which the government was affected by foreign criticism of the intensity of the repression.

Tombs is apparently one of those rare historians who strive to write with no greater certainty in drawing inferences than the available evidence permits. How unfortunate, then, are his careless, apparently unverified, comments about Karl Marx's alleged modification of his interpretation of the Commune between the 1871 *Civil War in France* and the famous letter of February 22, 1881, to Domela-Nieuwenhuis. Had Tombs relied directly on these and other of Marx's writings on the Commune, instead of on pot-pourri excerpts from them in John Plamenatz, he would at once have known that Marx never ceased to believe (a) that any insurrection at a time when the victorious Prussian Army surrounded Paris could not succeed, (b) that the most the Commune could achieve under the circumstances was a compromise with Versailles and (c) that while the Commune was not and could not be a socialist revolution, it nevertheless improvised the kind of unprecedented democratic structure which he felt would be needed by any future government committed to transition to a socialist society.

However, this is a minor criticism. Dr Tombs has made a substantial and a helpful contribution to the history of the Commune.

Politique et religion (413pp. Paris: Gallimard. 2 06 035457 1) prints the proceedings of the 20th Conference of French-speaking Jewish intellectuals.

Adding fancy to facts

Katherine Duncan-Jones

CLARKE HULSE
Metamorphic Verse
296pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £15.80.
0 691 06483 0

Elizabethan poets were apt to think, as Browning did, that "Fancy with fact is just one fact the more." Their poetic reconstructions of such wronged or wrongdoing figures as Fair Rosamund or Piers Gaveston were probably felt to have as much emotional and aesthetic validity as dramatic renderings of Brutus or Richard II. Indeed, perhaps it was the limitations which boy actors imposed on the exploration of female consciousness on the stage, as well as the precedents set by Ovid's *Heroides* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, that made so many Elizabethan writers of the 1590s choose to make female figures central in their "minor epics" – Venus, Hero, Lucrece, Elstred, Matilda and so on. Clark Hulse, in this interesting but extremely confused rag-bag of a book, does not make any connections between "minor epic" and drama, for he is a great compartmentalizer. Nor does he see the many authors of "Complaints" as simply refining on the *De Casibus* tradition – nothing for him is simple. He makes heavy weather of the aesthetic and historical theories underpinning the poems he calls "minor epics": Drayton's *Piers Gaveston*, for instance, is seen as

> straddling two unconnected notions of truth, both narrative, but one particular, historical, and based on the authority of others, the other mythic, poetical, and based on Drayton's own insight. The key-to-his reconciliation of the two lies in his intent to navigate through the shoals of fact by the compass of possibility, thereby suggesting a notion of verisimilitude as the proper channel for poetic history.

But was Drayton really as *clever* as this? He had not had the advantage of reading Tzvetan Todorov, as the notes tell us Hulse has done, and I find it hard to believe that he was much troubled by these complexities. Antiquarian gleanings and poetic imaginings went fairly serenely hand in hand for many authors in this period, as Sidney suggests they should in the *Defence of Poetry*. The messy injustice of actual historical events can only be enhanced by the poet, who makes them orderly and didactic.

This is only one of many sections of the book where Hulse sets up a veritable gallery of Aunt Sallies. In the chapter entitled "Petrarchan Rhetoric", for instance, he has this to say:

> The assimilation of Petrarchism as its vocabulary gave the minor epic its unique position . . . as socially central and morally marginal, and it created a dilemma for the middle-class poet such as Daniel or Shakespeare who found himself more vulnerable morally than he could ever be secure socially.

Define "Petrarchism", one longs to exclaim: define "minor epic", define "middle-class", define "vulnerable". For Hulse gets through the chapter without eiting a single specific poem or image of Petrarch's – and if he is really sure that he can distinguish clearly, in this period, between what is "moral" and what merely "social", I am sure we should all like to know more about how he does it. Hulse seems consistently to tackle problems that we would never guess were there if he hadn't told us. When we read, for instance, that Spenser "speaks in *periphrasis* and begs his reader to decode his rhetoric", we can guess what sort of critics our author has been reading, but we are scarcely the wiser about *Muiopotmos*.

There are many genuine problems posed by the poems – Ovidian epyllia and complaints – which Hulse brackets together as "minor epics". (Actually, though most of the poems are minor, only a very few bear any relation to epic, even in miniature or in stylistic allusion.) A fundamental problem is that of *tone*. The comic or even satiric treatment of classical myth in *Hero and Leander* and *Venus and Adonis* – the morbid cultivation of pathos in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Complaint of Rosamond* – these are puzzles to which Hulse does not address himself. Indeed, when he says of *Muiopotmos*, "One might even be taken in by the epic pomp of Spenser's *omnipotens finis* if the joke were not given away in the title", he betrays a lack of humour which comes close in obtuseness, as he does also in his solemnly laborious demonstration that the Marlowe of *Hero and Leander* was inspired by *furor poeticus*. A broader question is that of why these poems were written at all, and why a poem such as Daniel's *Rosamund* was so much admired. But we shall not find the answers here.

Though heavily footnoted, the book has no bibliography, so there is no complete list of the poems which Hulse considers to be "minor epics". Some which would seem to qualify according to his criteria, such as Lodge's *Complaint of Elstred*, do not rate a mention. The book is fairly lavishly illustrated, but such intriguing iconographical questions as the relationship of Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis to Titian's are handled with tantalizing superficiality. I cannot understand how Hulse can maintain that the artefact glazed on by Shakespeare's Lucrece is "a tapestry" when Shakespeare uses the word "paint" or "painter" at least a dozen times. Like many late-Victorian commentators, he seems unwilling to credit Shakespeare with enough imagination to reconstruct, even with Virgil's help, a painting he could not have seen in real life.

Heavenly homonyms

Raman Selden

HEATHER A. R. ASALS
Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God
145pp. University of Toronto Press. £24.50.
0 8020 5536 2

This book is a labour of love. Heather Asals follows Herbert's "Way to God" along the narrow defiles of his poetic language. She argues that verbal equivocation (pun, homonym) is the linguistic means by which Herbert brings together the earthly and the heavenly. This sacramental use of language "brings down from heaven the ontological presence of the Being of God". The book is based on the assumption that "for Herbert truth is located in the sound-consonancy of language itself expressed as the Name of God (I AM)". The various kinds of equivocacy found in the poetry are divided into five "cases": which constitute the "declension" of equivocacy.

The book is a subtle tribute to Herbert's Anglican middle way. The negative connotations of equivocation (compromise, unprincipled pragmatism) are replaced by a positive image of a Church which marks the site of a sacramental mid-point between heaven and earth. The "nominative case" of equivocacy is writing itself, which is the central equivocal subject of *The Temple*. Asals invokes the context of Biblical tradition, according to which the "letter" of the old law is superseded by the "spirit" of the new. Quoting Colossians 2.14, where Christ is described as "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us", she shows that while the Puritans treated this as announcing the total abolition of the ordinance of handwriting (ie, ceremonies), the Roman church, Herbert believed, legalism of the Pharisees by cultivating invalid ceremonies which have no sacramental wholesomeness. Herbert's poetry contains both views of language; it speaks of its own corruption and of the hope of salvation: "Language for the Anglican poet is a tool which acquaints man at once with his fall in Adam and his Redemption on the Cross."

The unspoken metaphysical foundation of the book is everywhere apparent. Throughout, opposites (head and body, letter and spirit, heavenly and earthly, God and man, sign and meaning) are unified in moments of full presence, in which the NOW of reading joins the eternity of the WORD. For example, in "Heaven", the mortal speaker's questions are answered by a divine "Echo", whose replies are derived from the questioner's own words. The homonyms (natural "leaves" become holy "leaves" – ie, the Bible) form a bridge between heaven and earth. The poet-preacher sacramentalizes language by breaking it (as the priest breaks the host) and makes it whole again "in the I AM of God". Asals writes of the "centrality of the homonym binding the many in the one."

The author herself recognizes that she has written in "a mixed genre of theology-criticism"; she wishes to inaugurate a tradition in Herbert criticism which will draw upon the extensive body of seventeenth-century theological hermeneutics. One is struck by the similarity of terminology and concepts between the many seventeenth-century texts discussed and modern structuralism and semiotics: it is surprising that Asals has excluded, for example, all reference to Jakobson on metaphor and metonymy, and to Saussure on signifiers and signifieds. This is partly because she is concerned with providing a strictly historical reading in the tradition of Martz and Tuve. More important, if she had allowed the intrusion of semiotics, the Coleridgean "willing suspension of disbelief", which she believes essential, would have been impossible. Reading *The Temple*, she declares, is "participating both in the act of worship and the act of consecration".

Even if one can participate on such terms, there must be reservations about the book's overall impact. By adopting Herbert's own equivocating style, Asals buries the reader in a web of admittied wordplay. The complex grammar of equivocation turns out to be a scholastic series of variations on a single proposition: "Equivocacy offers a recapitulation of the paradigm rendered by the Incarnation: man and God *in* one". Without this, the whole edifice collapses into the fragments of language the book seeks to unite in the Word. In other words, this reading of Herbert is essentially an act of worship, and as such is a finely performed ceremony.

Modern Philology: a journal devoted to research in medieval and modern literature, Volume 79, Number 3, February 1982 (University of Chicago Press. Four issues per year. Annual subscription $30 for institutions, $20 for individuals) contains articles by Robert E. Lewis on "The English Fabliau Tradition and Chaucer's Miller's Tale", Raymond B. Waddington on "Providential Theme and Symbolic Pattern in *Paradise Lost*, Book 3", William H. Youngren on "Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics" and Peter Collister on "A Postlude to Gladstone on *Robert Elsmere*: Four Unpublished Letters". The current issue of *Southern Review*, Volume 15, Number 1, March 1982 (University of Adelaide, South Australia. Three issues per year. Annual subscription $A13.50 for institutions, $A10.50 for individuals) includes essays by Marion Campbell on "Spenser's *Mutabilitie Cantos* and the End of *The Faerie Queen*" and K. K. Ruthven on "Critics and Cryptomorphs: Observations on the Concept of Hidden Form".